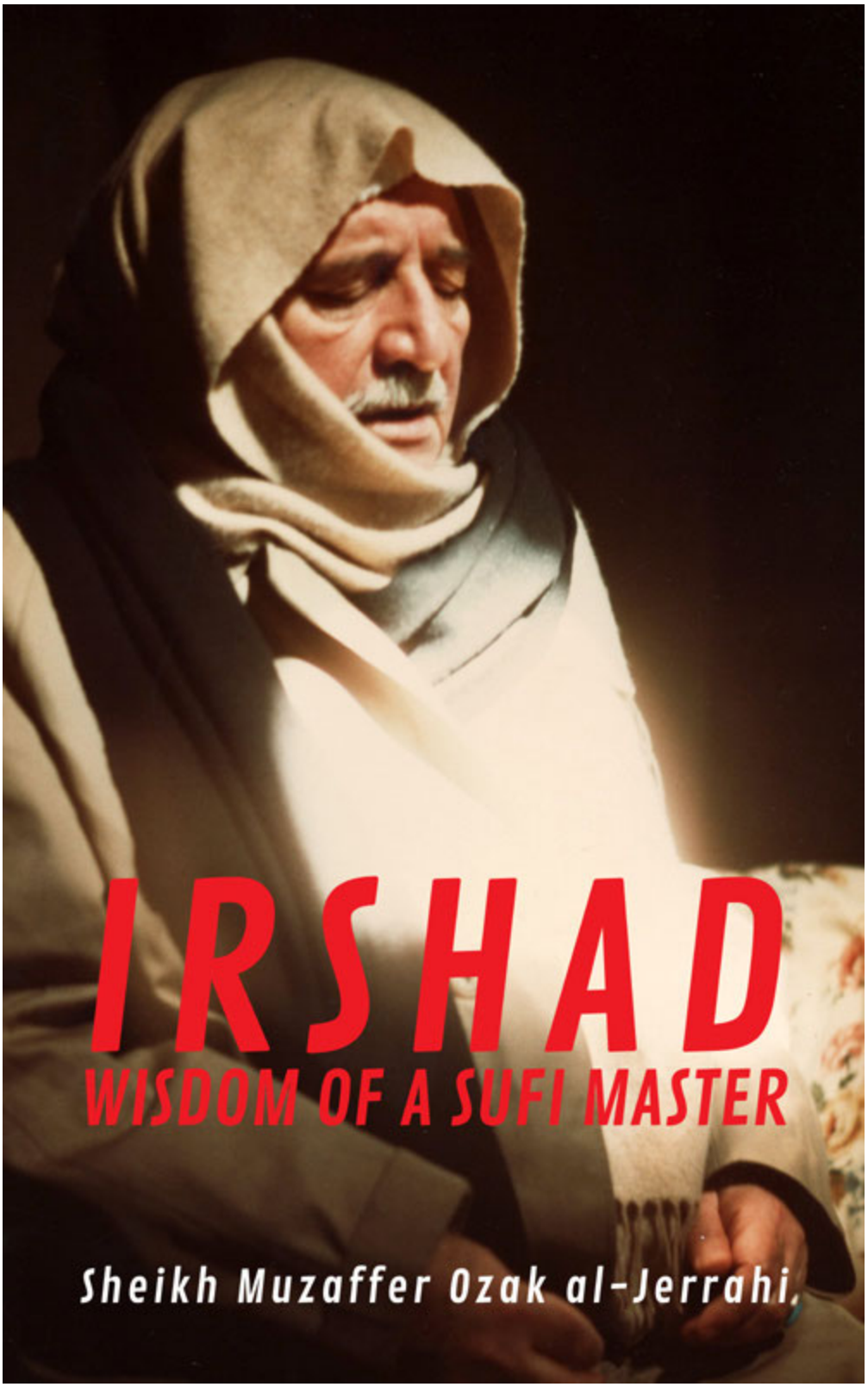
IRSHAD

WISDOM OF A SUFI MASTER

Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak al-Jerrahi.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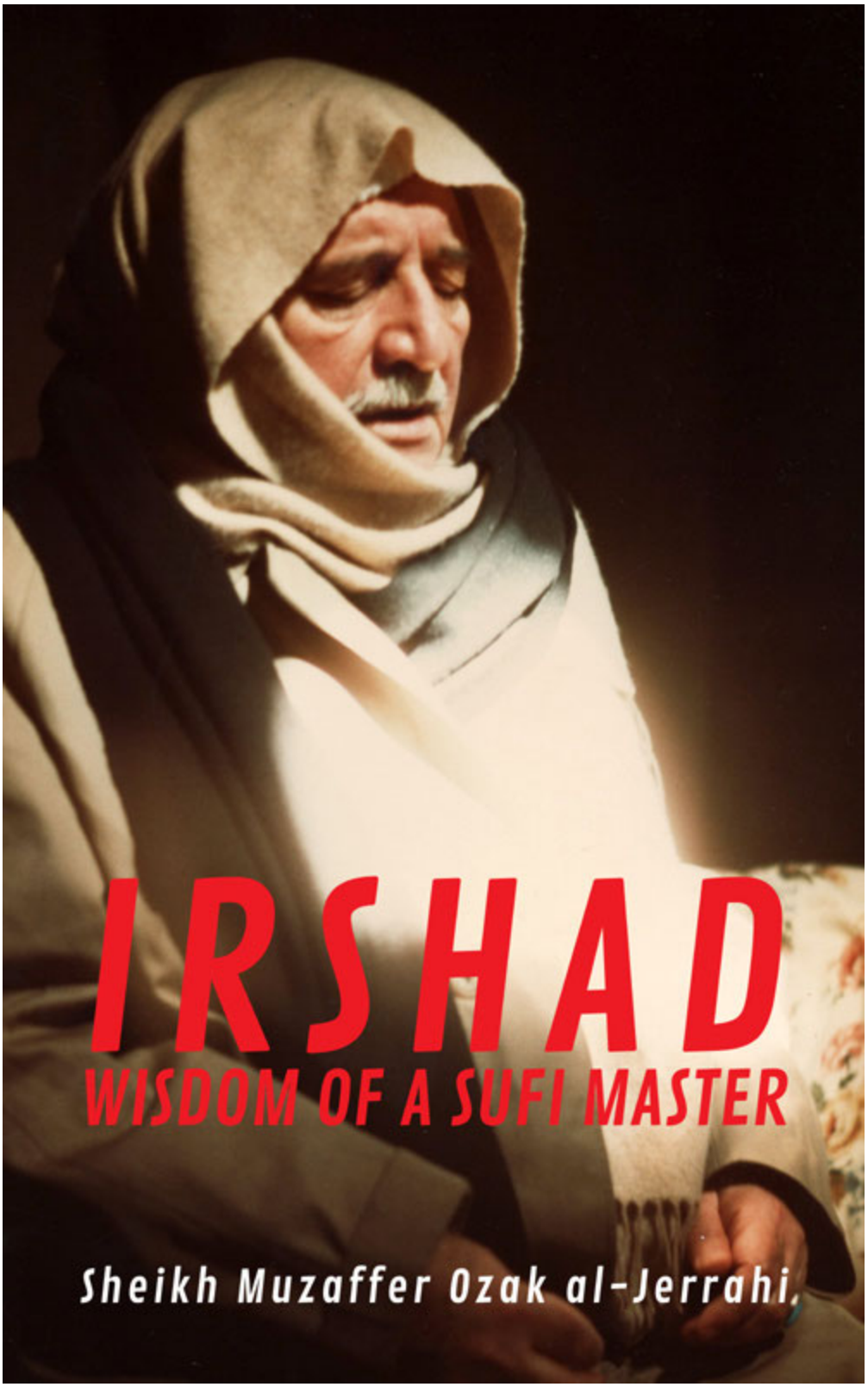
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SHEIKH MUZAFFER OZAK AL-JERRAHI

Translated with an Introduction by Muhtar Holland
Preface by Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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Preface

THE LONG TRADITION of Sufism has witnessed a wide variety of literary expressions through which the wisdom of the Sufi masters and teachers has been formulated and crystallized in human language. The literary forms developed over the centuries in the Islamic world include poetry, didactic essays, aphorisms, metaphysical expositions of extensive length, systematic formulations of doctrine as well as table talks and informal discourses. The present work continues this long Sufi tradition, using the last of these forms, namely discourses concerning various aspects of Sufism, both doctrinal and operative. These discourses seem to be addressed to immediate disciples but nevertheless also concern the world beyond the original intimate audience because the discourses deal with truths of universal import. They address in fact not only other Sufis, or Muslims interested in Sufism, but also men and women of other religious backgrounds who are attracted to the spiritual lift and the truths which constitute ultimately the very fiber and substance of the human soul. The Irshād is a contemporary Sufi treatise in the form of discourses which remains faithful to the Sufi tradition. It addresses not only the traditional audience of such works, but also all those in the contemporary world who are in search of the Sacred amidst the flood of profanation and meaninglessness which has inundated the life of modern humanity.

The discourses vary in their subject from the sublime description of the Divine Names and Qualities to everyday social duties. The work begins, in fact, with two chapters on God and the Prophet corresponding to the two Islamic testaments of faith (shahādah), namely Lā ilāha illa'Llāh, (there is no god but God [Allāh], and Muhammadun rasūl Allāh, Muhammad is the Messenger or Prophet of God. Therein is contained the foundation of all that is to follow. As for the Noble Qur'ān, the Sacred Book and the very Word of God, not only do its verses adorn the first two discourses, but the whole book in a sense flows from its verses and chapters. Many sections are

devoted to elucidating and clarifying the more inward meaning of some of these verses while a separate discourse is devoted to the Spirit of the Sacred Text.

Throughout this long work, what is especially striking is the centrality of love and devotion to the Prophet, a love which characterizes all Sufism. To love God, man must first be loved by Him. No one can in fact sense the love for God unless God loves him. And in the context of the Islamic revelation, God does not love anyone who does not love His Prophet, who was himself the beloved of God, one of his names being Habīb-Allāh, the beloved of God. Many of Sheikh Muzaffer's discourses are devoted to the inner reality of the Prophet, the significance of some of the major events of his life, the benediction sent upon him and the importance of following his traditions and wonts (Sunnah).

All aspects of Islam, from the Divine Law (al-Sharī°ah) which Muslims are required to follow in their daily lives to the most inward forms of contemplation and meditation, are rooted in the Noble Qur'ān and the Prophetic Sunnah. Sufism which is Islam as seen through the perspective of ihsān (virtue) or al-haqīqah (truth), also draws from these twin sources of Islamic revelation, namely the Qur'ān and Sunnah. It is likewise concerned with every aspect of life from the loftiest metaphysical doctrines and contemplative states to everyday events. That is why throughout the history of Islam the Sufis have defended and promulgated the Sharī°ah, while ultimately going beyond its external forms to the haqīqah which lies at its heart. Consequently, many of these discourses deal with Sharī°ite practices and prescriptions which, however, are viewed from the perspective of Sufism with the aim of bringing out their inner meaning.

The author also emphasizes over and over again the significance of the virtues in the life of the faqīr or practitioner of the path. He reminds the

reader continuously that the real test of a faqīr is the practice of the virtues such as magnanimity, generosity and sincerity at every moment of life and in concrete situations when God puts the soul through the tests for which, according to the Qur'ān, man was placed upon the earth. Many of these discourses are reminiscent of early Sufi treatises such as those of Sarrāj and Qushayrī, in which the discussion of Sufism is practically synonymous with that of the virtues. One must not forget the famous hadīth defining ihsān or virtue: "Ihsān is to adore God as though thou didst see Him, and if thou dost not see Him, He nonetheless seeth thee." This hadīth which is also a definition of Sufism reveals the centrality of virtue in any authentic exposition or practice of Sufism.

The Prophet has also said, "Die before you die". This initiatic saying is likewise central to Sufism, for one cannot follow the path until one has already died to the profane mode of consciousness which is based upon one's forgetfulness of God. Not only is one of the discourses of this book entitled "Die before you die", but, throughout the work, Sheikh Muzaffer reminds his readers of the reality of death. The message of the Noble Qur'ān is itself punctuated throughout with majestic verses reminding man of the eschatological realities; devout Muslims live all the years of their lives in awareness of this Qur'ānic teaching. In Sufism the remembrance of death becomes even more accentuated. The very practice of Sufism involves a constant dying until the soul actually dies to the world and becomes resurrected in the world of the Spirit. It is in conformity with this reality that the theme of death and eschatological discussions occur over and over again throughout the discourses.

In discussing these and other themes, Sheikh Muzaffer draws from the Qur'ān and Hadīth, sayings of earlier Sufis, and stories and parables. The exposition contains at once what belongs to the most intellectual and spiritual form of Sufism of the "elite" (khawāss) as well as popular sufism. There is something of both present throughout, reflecting the actual structure of most Sufi orders. The discourses reflect the sum of teachings

that usually permeate Sufi khanaqāhs or centers, and much that is found in the pages which follow is based on the oral tradition of the Halveti-Jerrahi Order of Sheikh Muzaffer as well as on written sources. The great merit of the work is that, whatever type of discussion or discourse takes place, it issues from orthodoxy, from a living tradition, in great contrast to so much that appears in print today by pretentious “teachers” who speak for no higher an authority than their own individual egos and psyches.

The Irshād is a testament to the fact that Sufism is a living tradition. Despite the ravages which the events of the past two centuries have brought upon the Islamic world and the attack made against Sufism by both the Western oriented modernists and the so-called fundamentalists and revivalists, Sufism continues to survive and in fact flourish to this day in many parts of the Islamic world, even in “secularized” Turkey from which the author of this book hails. To read such a work is to realize that it is still possible to find Sufi teachers who have kept alive the millennial spiritual teachings and practices of the Sufi tradition. Moreover, the fine translation, carried out with great care and love by a person who is himself devoted to such teachings, reveals the possibility of presenting Sufism in a contemporary Western world language in such a manner that it will be at once authentic and appealing to those in quest of the Sacred and the spiritual life. The present work is an addition to the body of genuine writings on Sufism which have appeared during the past half-century in European languages, mostly in French and English, by authentic authorities of the Sufi Tradition.

Like all Sufi works, the goal of the Irshād is to guide man to the remembrance of God, to dhikr Allāh. That is why all the discourses are interspersed with prayers and supplications. A sense of devotion and piety permeates the whole work; but the piety is not only religious in the exoteric sense of the term, it is a piety which is combined with interiority. That is why all the prayers mentioned in the work point toward the dhikr or remembrance to which in fact a separate discourse is devoted. To read this work is to remember God, and to remember that we should always

remember Him. We must be grateful for this gift of great value which makes available so much of the doctrines and practices of Sufism in the context of a living and contemporary Sufi order. And we must ask for God's Mercy to be showered upon the soul of the author who has already departed from this vale of forgetfulness for the abode of the Beloved, and who has already reached the realm of those who are awake, for according to the saying of the Prophet, "Man is asleep and when he dies he awakens."

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Washington, D.C.

Jumāda'l-ūlā, 1408 A.H.

December, 1987 A.D.

Introduction

Early in the morning of November 24, 1981, as I lay resting peacefully in the border zone between sleep and wakefulness, I found myself witnessing an unusually vivid dream or vision. The author of the Irshad was in New York at that time, on a visit from Istanbul, and I related my experience to him on the evening of the following day. Sheikh Muzaffer listened very intently, showing signs of considerable animation as my narrative progressed. He then declared that my dream was from a noble source, a message of good tidings, and he urged me to record it while the details were still fresh in my memory, so that the account of it could eventually be published as a preface to the English translation of the Irshad.

To the many who enjoyed the loving fellowship of Sheikh Muzaffer, he was known simply as ‘Efendi.’ At the end of our last meeting in this lower world, Efendi expressed the hope that I would always remember him as a friend. With the prayer that his soul may forever rejoice in the blissful fellowship of Allah’s Friends in the Life Hereafter, I take great pleasure in the publication of this work, and in fulfilling Efendi’s request by sharing this account of my dream-experience and Efendi’s interpretation:

I was standing on the surface of the sun, where I witnessed a thrilling and awe-inspiring display. Vast sheets and waves of fiery light were being blown about by hurricane winds, up and out into space.

After some time, I became aware of a change. I had not moved, yet the ‘surface of the sun’ had now become the head of an enormous being, so huge that I could not see beyond the top of his brow, which was like the horizon. The waves of light now appeared to be the luminous locks of this

being’s hair, streaming out in the strong breeze. They retained a fiery quality, and I saw a spark fly off from the end of a strand of hair.

The scene shifted. I saw that spark alight on a gloomy, forbidding old building. This was a high, menacing structure, with the atmosphere of a secret police headquarters. The spark quickly set the building on fire. In the light of the blaze, I saw that there was a whole city there, all equally dismal and gloomy, apparently under some cruel tyrant’s spell. All the buildings began to burn, collapsing as the fires raged out of control.

When the flames had subsided, I peered into the smoldering ruins. By the aid of some strange dream-optics, I looked through the ruins to see an unfolding vision of a prosperous new civilization. The people had evidently succeeded in combining a highly advanced technology with the preservation of natural ecology. The numerous machines and devices had a peculiar beauty of their own; they did not jar the senses. Curious architectural forms were in evidence. One of the building materials appeared to be an ivory-like substance of delicate beauty. The air was clean and fresh. A network of ‘roads’ or transportation channels of unusual design passed through vistas of lush vegetation. There were many signs of lively human activity in pleasant settings.

Without having seen its location or outside form, I was suddenly within a spacious auditorium, a kind of ‘United Nations’assembly hall. Thousands of people were seated in comfort. Through an aperture in the front of the hall (possibly some kind of video-screen; the technology of it was unfamiliar), a figure emerged to address the meeting on some subject or other. I then saw myself come forward to give an address. My theme was the need to worship the One Almighty God and surrender our self-will to His merciful safekeeping, following the example of His Messengers, in order to achieve prosperity in the Next World also. As I left, I noticed that all the people

present had acknowledged their Lord by humbling themselves in prostration.

As I left the great auditorium I was surprised by a shower of gold pieces falling right before my eyes. Then I realized that they were sewn together to form a curtain. For a moment or two I had the impression that the ‘show’ was over, and I prepared to drift off into a dreamless slumber. But a kind of curiosity made me ask: “What was that gold curtain?”

In response to my curiosity, the curtain reappeared before my eyes. As I drew back some distance from it, I saw that it was suspended on the Ka°ba in Mecca. In wonder, I drank in the beauty of the scene, feeling great joy at being back at the House of Allah. To my further delight, I noticed the face of my friend and fellow-Pilgrim, Nur (Lex) Hixon, beaming happily at me. We greeted each other warmly and thankfully. Then I beckoned to Nur to come and look at something very interesting I had observed. Part of the cloth covering of the Ka°ba appeared enlarged as if under a powerful microscope. One could see through the threads or fibers into a mysterious realm. It was as if the things I was seeing there were beyond my immediate comprehension, but that impressions were being taken by some special eye or inner camera.

“This is fascinating,” exclaimed Nur, “Let us examine the stone walls of the Ka°ba with this same eye.” The stones were also enlarged as if by an enormously powerful lens. So great was the magnification that the atoms or molecules stood apart. We found ourselves able to enter through the space between. Inside, we felt like atoms ourselves, in a universe of light. It was as if we became ‘Praise be to Allah—Al-hamdu lillah!’

Nur was like an excited little boy as we re-emerged from this amazing experience. “Let’s tell Efendi,” he cried. I turned to see Efendi standing nearby. He came toward us from his station in an arcade of the Sanctuary, looking young and happy. Efendi was dressed in a fine but simple robe. He smiled broadly as we exchanged greetings. His rich chuckle conveyed the meaning: “Even when people suppose we are at opposite ends of the globe, our spirits are together, visiting the House of God!”

I heard a rustling sound, like the wings of doves gently flapping. When I looked toward the Ka°ba, I saw beings or forms of light and many shades of color, too vast to identify as they moved around. After swirling around the Ka°ba, they gathered it up and bore it away into the heavens.

I looked down and recognized the pavement of Manhattan. Back in New York, I was smoking a fine meerschaum pipe, and I noticed that I was wearing a handsome winter coat of expensive material. Then I became fully aware of my quite ordinary self lying on the bed at home.

As I reflected on this experience, I wondered if it was something I should, or even dare share with others. What kinds of response might it evoke? Whatever it might ‘mean’ if interpreted in some fashion—if translated into mundane language—it certainly felt quite ‘genuine’ to me; but perhaps it was best to take it simply on its own terms, as a valid and real insight into whatever realms of experience I had glimpsed. A kind of stillness descended upon me as my hesitations were resolved. I slipped back into that border zone and found myself in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina the Illumined City, where I heard a voice telling me: “Courage, Muhtar! Tell about the things you have just witnessed—wherever and to whomever it will feel right and necessary.”

During the following day, the feeling grew in me that I should communicate the experience to Efendi during the evening gathering for friendly conversation at the Masjid al-Farah, the Mosque in New York City. Moreover, something indicated to me that I should tell the dream in Turkish. To my relief, suitable words, expressions and sentences kept coming into my mind as I drove into the City. With considerable effort, but supported by some special flow of energy, I told my story in Efendi's native language, in fact in the rather Ottoman style of his own writings! Efendi's evident interest encouraged me, as did the expressions on the faces of Turkish brothers and sisters present, not to mention the patience and lack of protest on the part of those who did not understand the Turkish language.

As I mentioned at the beginning, Efendi declared his conviction that my dream was from a noble source, a message of good tidings. As interpreted by Sheikh Muzaffer, the dream had brought the good news that Allah would sweep away the dark tyrannies oppressing mankind, and lead us by the light of faith to 'True Democracy and Freedom.'

SHEIKH MUZAFFER'S PLACE IN ISLAMIC SUFI TRADITION AS REVEALED IN HIS NAMES AND TITLES

SHEIKH EL-HAJ MUZAFFER OZAK ASHKIYYUL-JERRAHIYYUL-HALVETI:

This Anglicized spelling is not an academic transliteration; it appropriately reflects the Turkish pronunciation (and to some extent the modem Turkish spelling), rather than the Arabic origin of most elements in the name. These elements are briefly explained as follows:

SHEIKH: From the Arabic shaykh (or shaikh), meaning "an elder". Most familiar to Westerners as the designation of an Arabian tribal chieftain (as in "The Oil Sheikhs"). Throughout the Islamic world, however, the term is also applied to respected persons of recognized seniority in learning, experience or wisdom. A Sheikh in this sense may enjoy popular esteem without occupying any formal institutional position. The title may belong officially to a senior scholar in an Islamic college or university. "Sheikh" is also the customary title of the head of a Sufi Order, or of a major branch of such an Order. The author of the Irshād, for instance, became Sheikh Muzaffer when he occupied the "sheepskin throne" as the 19th Sheikh of the Jerrahi branch of the Halveti Order.

EL-HAJ: From the Arabic al-hājj, meaning one who has performed the Pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the "Five Pillars" of Islam and a religious duty incumbent on every able-bodied Muslim of sufficient means. Sheikh Muzaffer made the Pilgrimage eleven times, although it is strictly obligatory only once in a lifetime.

MUZAFFER: The personal, "given" name. Approximate Islamic equivalent of Victor, since the Arabic muzaffer means "one who is enabled to succeed; victorious, triumphant."

OZAK: The clan-name of Sheikh Muzaffer's ancestors on his mother's side. Adopted as an official Western-style surname to comply with the law enacted under Ataturk (in 1934), which requires the use of such family names in the secular Republic of Turkey. For official purposes (e.g. in postal address), Sheikh Muzaffer was plain "Muzaffer Ozak" in his native land.

ASHKIYYUL-JERRAHIYYUL-HALVETI: Three relative adjectives linked as in the original Arabic construction ([al-]°ishqiyyu'l-jarrāhiyyu'l-khalwatī).

Taken separately, they are:

ASHKI: Sheikh Muzaffer's own special dervish name within the Sufi Order, characterizing his individual style and emphasis (his meshreb). The Turkish word ashk is from the Arabic °ishq, meaning love (of the most intense and ardent kind). For "Ashki", the spiritual path was above all the Path of Love.

In The Garden of the Dervishes, Sheikh Muzaffer writes:

Love is the most advanced and highest level of affection. Genuine human affection is divine affection: being a lover of the Truth. Divine affection is induced by God's affection for His servant. Moreover, when the All-Glorious One has affection for a servant of His, He causes that servant to be loved by all who know Him and love His Exalted Essence. All creatures love and obey the beloved servant of Allah.

In The Unveiling of Love, we read:

Three letters and five dots are what make a dervish a dervish. In Arabic, the word for Love is spelled with the three letters °ayn, shīn, and qaf. There are three dots on the letter shin and two on the letter qāf. The three letters and five dots that make a dervish are the Sovereign Power of Love. The loveless is no dervish, or at least none worthy of the name … Those who do not

drink the wine of “He loves them and they love Him” (Qur’ān 5:54), who do not forsake themselves body and soul, who do not tread love’s path bareheaded and barefoot, they cannot be dervishes …

JERRAHI: Belonging to the Jerrahi branch of the Halveti Order. The Jerrahiyye was founded by a Saint known as the venerable Pir Sultan Seyyid Muhammed Nureddin el-Jerrahi, who was born in Istanbul in the year 1089 of the Islamic era (1678). This brief account of his life was related to serious enquirers in the early 1920’s:

The prosperous abode in which he was born … still stands, facing the main gate of the noble Congregational Mosque of Jerrah Pasha, in the Jerrah Pasha quarter, near Aksaray in Istanbul. He issued from the pure loins of his most worthy father, the venerable Seyyid Abdullah Agha, who was Second Master of the Horse to Sultan Ahmed III, and was born into the world from the chaste womb of his mother, the venerable Sherife Emine Teslima (Allah’s mercy be upon her!)

At the age of nineteen, he had been appointed to the office of Kadi (Islamic judge) in Cairo, Egypt. Before taking up this appointment, the venerable Pir was urged by his maternal uncle, Hajji Menla Efendi, a chief minister, to pay a visit to the Saint of the Circle of Wisdom, Sheikh Ali el-Halveti, better known as Küstendilî, who occupied the sheepskin throne in the noble lodge of the venerable Selâmî Efendi at Uskudar. As soon as this saintly person set eyes on the venerable Pir, he deigned to give utterance, with profound spiritual force, to the words: “Welcome, Nureddin, my son!”

Having experienced the states manifested to his essence of exalted attributes in the Saint’s noble circle of remembrance, the venerable Pir performed the hand-taking of repentance. At that moment, he was granted

access to the mystery of “Die before you die”, which entailed his resignation from the Kadi-ship we mentioned. Regarding him self as already deceased, he entrusted to Hajji Menla Efendi the distribution of his property among his heirs, in accordance with the divinely ordained rules of Islamic law; he gave over to him the very clothes he was wearing, to be returned along with the glorious scroll and insignia investing him with the office of Kadi. Wrapping himself in the coarse woolen cloak conferred by the Sheikh, he remained in service in the Sheikh’s tekke.

On assuming the deputy’s role at the age of twenty-six, he underwent a forty-day retreat in the noble place of seclusion within the Congregational Mosque of Janfeda Hanim, which had links with the fortunate circle of the khānaqāh (dervish lodge).

Afterwards, his own noble khānaqāh was bought for him by the Sovereign of the Age, Sultan Ahmed III, to whom the apostolic will of our venerable Master, the Most Noble Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace!), had been revealed in a dream. It was inaugurated in the year 1115 of the Hijra (1703/1704), and he assumed the office of Sheikh for 18 years—the numerical value of the Arabic letters spelling the Divine Name Hayy (“Ever-Living”).

On a Monday coinciding with the eve of the Feast of Sacrifice in the year 1133 (1721), he made the transition from this impermanent realm to the Realm of Beauty, and was laid to rest in the blessed place that had been his room of retreat in his noble lodge …

When his venerable mother migrated to the Abode of Paradise in the year 1115 of the Hijra, she was buried in front of his blessed room of retreat. Thus, when the venerable Pir himself passed on, his burial toward his

mother’s noble foot revealed the mystery of the Prophetic saying: “Paradise lies beneath mothers’ feet.”

The Jerrahi Sheikhs trace their spiritual lineage to “the Prince of Men, Imām °Alī the Elect” by the following chain or silsila:

Our Master, the noble Messenger of Allāh—the venerable Imām °Alī—the venerable Junayd al-Baghdādī—the venerable Pīr Ibrāhīm Zāhid Geylānī—the venerable Pīr °Umar al-Khalwatī—the venerable Pīr Sayyid Yahyā Shirwānī—the venerable Pīr Mehmed Erzinjânî—the venerable Pīr Ahmed Shemsuddin, better known as Yighit Pasha— the venerable Pīr Kara Hisarî Ramazanuddin—Seyyid Sheikh Alâ’eddin Küstendilî, the conscious teacher of our own Pīr—the venerable Pīr of our Order, Seyyid Sultan Muhammed Nureddin el-Jerrahî …

The voice of Pīr Nureddin resounds to this day, when the Jerrahi dervishes chant the great ilâhî (hymn or anthem) he bequeathed to them:

Dil beytini pak iden

Dervishi anka iden

Âlem-i lâhut’e giden

Mevlâ zikri-dir, zikr-i Hak

The heart’s abode it purifies

The dervish into phoenix it transforms

To the Realm of the Divine it leads

’Tis the Remembrance of the Lord,

Remembrance of the Truth.

HALVETI: Of the Halveti Order (Khalwatiyya).

The Saint generally regarded as the founder of this Order is the venerable Pīr ºUmar al-Khalwatī, who died in Syria about 800/1397. His name appears in the Jerrahi silsila given above. The order attracted a popular following in many regions of the Islamic world, and ramified into many offshoots and branches over the centuries. From an early center in Azerbaijan, Halveti Sheikhs migrated to various principalities in Anatolia during the period following the dissolution of Mongol rule in that area. A major Halveti tekke was established in Istanbul after the Ottoman conquest of that city (formerly Constantinople) in 1453. The Order then spread throughout the far-flung dominions of the expanding Ottoman Empire, into the Balkan lands and later into Egypt.

In his interesting article Khalwatiyya in the Encyclopedia of Islam (New Edition, Vol. IV, Leiden, 1978), F. de Jong describes the spread of the Order in Egypt in the 19th and 20th centuries as “spectacular.” He cites evidence of Khalwati/ Halveti activity in Communist Albania prior to the Albanian “Cultural Revolution” in 1967, and in parts of Yugoslavia as recently as 1971.

The Sufi Orders were officially abolished and banned in Republican Ibrkey (from 1925)- Only a few years earlier, numerous tekkes of various Halveti branches were active in Istanbul, including no fewer than ten for the Jerrahis. For several decades, the Sufi traditions were maintained here and there in Turkey as a quiet, “underground” activity. The Jerrahis succeeded in preserving their chief center, the tomb of Pīr Nureddin and the adjoining mosque-tekke premises in the Karagümrük quarter of Istanbul, by meeting unobtrusively behind closed doors and avoiding any political involvement. Even in the more relaxed climate of the mid-1960’s, it was a very daring act on the part of Sheikh Muzaffer when, immediately after the funeral prayers for his predecessor, he accepted the guidance received in a dream, “and although the activities of the Sufis were still forbidden and the tekkes were closed by law … , I opened the doors of our tekke to the public, to friends and enemies alike.”

“Halveti” derives from the Arabic word khalwa, meaning “seclusion, solitude”. The Order acquired its name from the practice of retreat for spiritual exercise and contemplation, a particular form of khalwa/halvet, which would last from three to forty days.

Sheikh Muzaffer may be seen as having brought his Order, and the Jerrahi branch especially, out of an exceptionally prolonged retreat: one of forty years rather than forty days …

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SHEIKH MUZAFFER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In 1981, Sheikh Muzaffer wrote the following brief autobiography which is reproduced here from his The Unveiling of Love.

It was in 1916 (A H. 1332) that my mother, Hajja Aysha Ozak, brought me into the world. My birthplace was our house near the tekke (Sufi meeting place) of the Jerrahi Dervishes in the Karagümrük quarter of Istanbul.

My father, Hajji Mehmed Efendi of Konya, was an Islamic scholar and a teacher at the court of Sultan Abdul Hamid. He was the first scholar in a long line of warriors. My two uncles were standard-bearers with the forces of Ghazi Osman Pasha, the hero of Plevna. One of them was promoted to the rank of general for his bravery in saving the standard from falling into the hands of the enemy. He was wounded in a later battle and taken prisoner by the Russians, but after his release from captivity he continued to serve as a general in the Ottoman army until the day he died. My other uncle, Bekir, fell in action at Plevna and was accorded a martyr's funeral.

My father's family was an old one, which divided into two branches: the Jebejioghullari and the Bashaghaoghullari. Breaking with the family's military tradition, my father Mehmet Efendi studied at the Kurshunlu medrese (Islamic school) in Suleymaniye, Istanbul. He was then posted to the school in Plevna, at that time still part of the Ottoman Empire, where he married my mother, Aysha Hanum.

My mother was the granddaughter of Seyyid Hussein Efendi, the Halveti Sheikh of the town of Yanbolu. Her father was Captain Ibrahim Agha, from the district of Eregli on the Black Sea, who had studied at the maritime college in the time of Sultan Mahmud the Just. Having fallen ill on a voyage to what is now Bulgaria, he went to seek treatment at the Yanbolu tekke. This was how my grandfather came to meet Sheikh Hussein Efendi, eventually joining his tekke through marriage to his daughter. Seyyid Hussein Efendi was brother to the governor of Yanbolu.

When the Balkan provinces were lost in 1878 (A.H. 1293), the surviving members of my family migrated to Istanbul, where my father received his appointment to the Imperial Palace. My father's ancestors belonged to the Kizilkecheli clan of the tribe known as Kayi Turk. My mother's family, the Ozaks, were Seyyids descended from °Alī, son-in-law of the Prophet, on him be peace.

My father, Mehmed Efendi, died tragically when I was only six months old. My elder brother, Murad Reis, survived the 1914-1918 war, which caused the loss of many of my relatives, only to be killed one Friday in Istanbul by the Occupation forces. I had no one left but my mother, my sister, and two cousins, little girls orphaned by the war. We were destitute.

At that time, when I was five or six years old, I was taken into the care of my father's schoolmate, Seyyid Sheikh Abdurrahman Samiyyi Saruhani of the Kadiri, Nakshbandi, Ushaki, and Halveti Orders who saw to my upbringing for twelve years. During this time I finished primary school and was in the second year of secondary school when God took to His mercy my beloved Sheikh, who was as dear to me as my own father. Meanwhile I had been studying the Qur'ān and had committed many parts of it to memory. I completed these studies under the chief Imām of the Fatih Mosque, Mehmed Rasim Efendi. For the next eight years I followed the

lectures of Arnavut Husrev Efendi on Hadith and Islamic law. Poverty obliged me to work by day, but in the evenings I studied under Gumuljineli Mustafa Efendi, who was nicknamed the “Walking Library.”

In due course I qualified as a muezzin and served in that capacity first at the Ali Yaziji, then at the Soghan Agha Mosque. From there I moved to the Kefeli Mosque in Karagümrük, where I was instructed by the Imām, Shakir Efendi, in the art of book dealing. Then I was appointed muezzin to the Grand Mosque of Beyazit, beside which the booksellers have their market.

It was while I was serving at this mosque that I met the Imām of Bakirköy, Hafiz Ismail Hakki Efendi, who admired my voice and my style. This pupil of Eyuplu Hafiz Ahmed, the son of the famous musician Zekai Efendi of the Mevlevi Order, was to teach me the religious hymns and odes known as ilahi, kaside, durak, mevlud, and mersiye. My teacher was so fond of me that he gave to me in marriage his close relative Gülsüm Hanum, who was headmistress of a school. Thus I became part of his family. I moved into my bride’s house, near the Suleymaniye Mosque built by the famous architect Sinan. I had been appointed Imām of the Veznejiler Mosque, and for twenty-three years I was to serve as honorary Imām at the great Suleymaniye during the month of Ramadān. When my own mosque collapsed, I was appointed Imām of the mosque in the Covered Bazaar.

As this mosque had no pulpit, and was therefore unsuitable for Friday congregational prayers, the community helped to restore a nearby ruin and I started leading Friday prayers there, in response to popular demand. This restored mosque is known as Jamili Han. Although now retired from the Imāmate, I still lead Friday prayers there and give guidance and instruction in an honorary capacity.

At present I am the owner of a large bookstore, which is visited by people from all over the world. I can claim some knowledge of old manuscripts, since before my military service I studied calligraphy and decorative art under the Chief Calligraphers at the Academy of Fine Art, Hajji Kamil, Haji Nureddin, and Turakesh Ismail Hakki Bey, as well as having forty-two years of practical experience in the book trade.

My first marriage lasted twenty years, but produced no children. I remarried after the death of my first wife, and am now the father of a girl and a boy.

I have performed the Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina eleven times. Iraq I have visited six times, Syria and Palestine eight, Egypt three. In all these places I got to know many Sufis and Sheikhs. I have also met Sheikhs and scholars in Istanbul and other Turkish cities, have enjoyed their company, and have learned their views and teachings.

But of all the venerable persons I have met, I profited most from the one who was my benefactor and first Sheikh of my tender years, Sheikh Samiyyi Saruhani Ushshakiyul-Halveti. This holy person wrote over twenty books on Islamic law and Sufism, in Turkish and in Arabic. All of these works have been published. I also know of his many unpublished manuscripts on chemistry, alchemy, herbal medicine, and other subjects, which were destroyed during a fire that wiped out a great part of Istanbul. In fact, he himself destroyed some of his books on chemistry and alchemy, being in doubt whether they would be used for good purposes. This wonderful person, with whom I spent much of my childhood, was loved and respected by all for his noble character, good humor, generosity, courage, friendliness, and humility.

The next guide I was to encounter during my early youth was another Halveti Sheikh from the Shabaniya branch, Seyyid Sheikh Ahmed Tahir ul-Marashi. His specialization was Sheikh Ibn al-'Arabi. With him I studied al-Futuhat al-Makkiya and the Fusus. I studied the interpretation of the Qur'ān under Nevshehirli Haji Hayrullah and Atif Hoja. I followed the teachings of Haji Abdul Hakim Arvasi and Sheikh Shefik Efendi, and with the wisdom received from these wonderful men of knowledge I have for thirty years preached to and taught the people in forty-two mosques in Istanbul, including huge crowds in the grand mosques of Sultan Ahmed (Blue Mosque), Yeni Jami, Nuruosmaniye, Beyazit, Laleli, Valide Sultan, Fatih, Eyub, Kojamustafa Pasha, and Suleymaniye.

During my early youth, while studying Qur'ān interpretation at the Aya Sofya Mosque in Istanbul, I dreamed one night of the Prophet, on him be peace. He was riding his camel, led by Imām °Alī, may God be pleased with him, who was holding in his other hand his famous sword, the two-edged Zulfikar. Addressing me, the Prophet asked if I had faith and if I was a Muslim. When I said yes, he asked if I would give my head for Islam, Again I said yes. Then the Prophet told Imām °Alī to cut my head off in the name of Islam. Imām °Alī asked me to stretch my neck out, then struck me with all his might, severing my head from my body. I awoke in terror. When I saw my Qur'ān teacher next morning, I told him my dream and then told him who my father was. I knew he was a close friend of my late father, but I had never mentioned it before. He shook his head and said: " Ah, so you are the son of my fellow exile, are you?" My father and my teacher were among the seven hundred Sheikhs and theologians who were banished to the port of Sinop on the Black Sea by the revolutionaries of the Committee of Union and Progress, for having supported the Sultan. The exile of these religious dignitaries had continued until the First World War in 1914.

My teacher then interpreted my dream and said that I was going to join the Sufi path of °Alī and that I would become the Sheikh of a particular order.

Many years after that incident, when I had opened my store of rare books near the Beyazit Mosque and become a well-known Imām and preacher, I had another dream. I was in the middle of the Bosphorus between the Topkapi Palace and Uskudar, in a small sailing boat whose sails were torn and whose mast was broken. A terrible storm was raging. Someone handed me a sheet of paper and told me to read it so that I would be saved from the calamity. When I came back to my shop next morning, I saw the very person who had given me the paper in my dream, passing in front of my shop. I could not gather the courage to call him. A couple of days later I dreamed about the same person. He was walking on the other side of the street and beckoned to me with his walking stick. The next morning, in amazement, I again saw him passing in front of my shop. I felt that there was a spiritual meaning to these dreams, but I did nothing about it. A short while later I saw the same man again in a dream in which he hugged me so hard that I felt my bones about to break. Then he let me go, held up the crown of the Halveti Order, and put the turban on my head. I felt crushed under the weight of the turban. It was as if the seven heavens were sitting on my head.

As soon as I came to open my shop in the morning, I saw the man walking by, stick in hand. I told myself: “There is a mystery and a spiritual message in this situation. I am not going to call this man. Let him come to me. He walked by, my eyes following him, then he stopped and came and stood in front of my shop, stuck his head through the door, and said: “You bigot, three times you have seen me. When are you going to start having faith?”

“Right now,” said I, grabbing and kissing his hand. This holy person was Seyyid Sheikh Ahmed Tahir ul-Marashi, the Sheikh of the Halveti-Shabani. I became his dervish, and he would come to my shop every day. Some days he would speak, on others remain silent, but in either case he would be teaching me. This continued for seven years.

During this time I met a friend of my master, Evranoszade Sami Bey, who belonged to the same order. It was he who clad me in the dervish cloak. In that ceremony, I knew so little that I objected to the cloak being put on my shoulders: “O Master, how can I permit someone like you to hold my cloak for me?” I was told that my mind did not yet grasp the subtle meaning, but that they were giving me the dervish cloak to wear.

Sami Bey left this world one Night of Power. Three years later my master Tahir Efendi fell and broke his hip as he was walking from my shop. As I was trying to lift him up, he said: “They have been trying to destroy me, and now at last they have succeeded.” He lasted three months. When I visited him before his death, he once showed me the crown of the Saint Ibrahim Kushadali and said, “If I go, let Mustafa Efendi keep this crown.” This Mustafa Efendi was one of his khalifas. Then one day my master called me and told me his last wishes. He died the next day, which was a Saturday, and we buried him in the graveyard of the Fatih Mosque, next to Sheikh Turbedar Efendi, who had been his Sheikh.

That night, having submitted to God the question whether I should become the dervish of Mustafa Efendi, I dreamed that he was laughing at me boisterously. I could not ascribe a meaning to this, so I submitted my question a second time. That night I dreamed that he was shouting at me angrily and calling me “softy.” Under these circumstances I could not become his dervish. I was left for a while without a Sheikh, waiting for a spiritual message. During that time I visited the tekke of the Kadiris in Beyoglu and then the Rifais in Kasim Pasha. The Halveti tekke had burned down. These two places were the only centers where the dhikr ceremony was held.

During that time Gavsi Efendi, the Sheikh of the Kadiris, tried to persuade me to become his khalifa, using as intermediaries Ismail Efendi, the Sheikh of the Bedevis; Jevat Efendi, the Sheikh of the Sadis; and Colonel Salahettin Efendi, the Sheikh of the Sunbulis. I told them that although my Sheikh was dead, I was a Halveti; thus I could not decide by myself, but would have to submit the matter and wait for a spiritual message; if I received a positive answer, I would not need to be a khalifa, but would gratefully accept to be a humble dervish of the Sheikh.

Sheikh Gavsi Efendi kept pressing me, and finally insisted that I should come to the dergah (Sufi meeting place) unshaven the next Friday, which was the holy day of Ragha'ib, the first Friday of the month of Rajab.

That night I submitted my problem and dreamed that I was performing dhikr at the tekke of the Halveti-Jerrahis in Karagümrük, bareheaded, barefoot, and half-naked, while the Sheikh, Seyyid Fahri Efendi, was sitting by the window, in an ordinary suit but wearing a white prayer cap. He was singing the eulogy by Sheikh Galip: "Your sermon is read from the pulpit of eternity; your verdict is given in the court of Judgement Day; your chant of praise is sung on earth and in Heaven. You are my beloved Ahmad, Mahmud, Muhammad."

I woke up. Everything was clear. But how was I to present myself to Fahri Efendi? As far as I knew his tekke was closed. I had known him slightly, when I used to take Hadith lessons from Mustafa Efendi, the "Walking Library." He used to take me by the hand to see the Sheikh, complaining to him that I had become too rigidly dogmatic, then make me kiss his hand and ask him to pray for me. But so many years had passed. Perhaps I had seen him a few times at his house during Ramadan, when we were invited to break the fast. I was merely a child at that time. Since then I had become a preacher of some repute. I had a lot of followers. As the tekkes were

officially closed, the Sufis gathered clandestinely. I did not even know whether he was still teaching and had followers. Nevertheless I decided to go to his house late one night after the night prayer, telling myself that the Sheikhs are gracious and that he would not turn me away from his door.

The door was opened by a young dervish, to whom I introduced myself, asking permission to see the Sheikh. I was invited into a small room where I saw the master with three other men. He paid me the honor of standing to receive me, and asked me to take a seat. I was ready to abstain from my usual cigarette, but he offered me one and said smilingly: “Don’t be embarrassed. Smoke, and have a cup of coffee too. Coffee without a cigarette is like sleeping without a blanket in winter.” He added: “Among ourselves we attach more importance to love than to respect.” When he asked me the reason for my visit, I told him what was going on between me and the Kadiri Sheikh Gavsi Efendi, and about the result of my meditation and the dream. Then I told him who I was, where I was born, who my father was. He laughed and said: “Who doesn’t know the famous preacher to women?”

I responded: “If I could find some men, I would preach to them too.”

In religion, of course, there is not fundamental difference between men and women. I was in fact preaching to both sexes, but I understood the point he was making: Real men would not be prevented from remembering and calling upon God at every moment. Then he told me: “Indeed your dream points to us, but let me also submit the matter and see what message I receive.” He asked me to come back on Monday. Then I took my leave.

That Monday, Sefer Efendi,* who was a young dervish then and who is now my khalifa, brought a letter delaying my meeting with the Sheikh to

the following Friday. That Friday, having received a positive message from the Unseen, Sheikh Fahri Efendi accepted me as his dervish. Thus I preferred to become a dervish of the Halveti-Jerrahis rather than a khalifa of the Kadiris. I followed my duties as a dervish to the last detail, and visited my Sheikh two or three times a week. A happy man with a great sense of humor, he was brave, intelligent and prudent. He was a master of dream interpretation, a faculty given especially to the Halved Order. He was a man whose conversation was a delight, whose miracles were well known. Loved and respected by everyone, he was a man who made us taste the love of the Prophet, the mysteries of the Saints; a compassionate man and a generous one who protected the poor and bound everyone to himself.

Sometimes he used to joke with me so much that he pushed me to the verge of anger, hoping to get a reaction from me. Then he would publicly declare that I was invited by our Saint Nureddin Jerrahi and no one could touch me. Later I was told that the master had often mentioned my name six months before my coming to the tekke. Six months after my becoming a Jerrahi dervish, I dreamed that three men came to examine me. From the questions and answers I clearly felt that two of them wanted me to pass this test and one of them did not. This was an examination to qualify as an Imām. I was able to convince the third man that I was an Imām already, and was therefore accepted by unanimous vote.

Although I knew that dreams should be told immediately, I could not do so the next day because I was too busy. That night, I went to sleep after praying for three or four hours, and dreamed an extremely ugly and shameful dream. When I woke up, I was revolted with myself and said to myself: “That is your reward for praying three or four hours.” Somehow I was not able to see my Sheikh that day either, and even if I had seen him, how could I have told him the shameful dream?

The third night I dreamed that I went to the tekke and saw the dervishes praying in a very strange way, not reciting correctly and not doing the movements properly. I passed through in astonishment and met my Sheikh in the garden. He caught me by one ear and lifted me off the ground. With his other hand he kept slapping my left side as if he were dusting a rug. Then he pulled me into a room which was full of garbage. He said: “Clean this room, it is going to be yours.” Later I saw that the room of which I had dreamed was the room of the head khalifa.

When I woke up, I knew that this was my punishment for not telling my dream to my master. I rushed to his house and told him the first and last dreams, leaving out the shameful one. He smiled and told me: “You could not have had those two dreams without a shameful one in the middle.” I begged to be left alone with him to tell him the ugly dream. When I told him, he declared me his khalifa.

For nine years we stayed very close together. One year before he died, he became ill in the middle of the dhikr and put me in charge. I led the dhikr that whole year while he was sick. At the end of that year, on the 5th of Shaban, which is the day of the martyrdom of Imām Hasan, a Wednesday night at ten minutes to ten, he went to the eternal abode, to the gardens of high heaven, and received the gift of being close to the Messenger of God. The next day, in accordance with his last wishes, I gave him the ritual ablution, while Sefer Baba and Kemal Baba poured the water. On Friday I led his funeral prayers at the Fatih Mosque. Followed by thousands of lovers we brought his coffin on our shoulders to his room in the tekke, which he had built seven years before his death, and buried him close to our Saint Nureddin Jerrahi. The prayers at his tomb were recited by the famous Shemseddin Yeshil Efendi. Acting upon another dream I had dreamed, and although the activities of the Sufis were forbidden and the tekkes were closed by law, the very day after his departure I opened the doors of the tekke to the public, to friends and enemies alike.

Having occupied the sheepskin throne of our Saint Nureddin Jerrahi for fifteen years now, I humbly continue teaching my Turkish dervishes, as well as many lovers of truth from all parts of the world.

I am the nineteenth Sheikh and eighth khalifa since the creation of our branch of the order. With the strength received from the will of God, the wish of His Messenger, the good pleasure of my Saint, the spirituality of all the Sheikhs before me, and the blessing involved in the spiritual guidance of lovers till the day I die. I have only two children born of my blood, but God knows the number of my spiritual children. I have had the honor of seeing the Prophet, on him be peace, seventeen times in the world of dreams. I have seen Moses, Jesus, John, and Khidr once. I have seen both the venerable Abū Bakr and °Umar twice, and in one these dreams I kissed their hands. I have seen both the noble Fātima and Imām °Alī twice, and Imām Hasan and Imām Hussein once. I have seen my Saint Nureddin Jerrahi twice, receiving his compliments.

I have traveled to Germany six times, twice to England, and twice to Holland and Belgium, and have seen Paris four times. I have met many good and interesting people during these travels. I have also visited Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Greece. I have been to America many times, where my dervishes and I performed the dhikr and held talks in many cities.

Only God knows what will happen next. I pray that the love of lovers may increase from day to day. Success comes only from God.

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It was in the New World that Sheikh Muzaffer's special destiny revealed itself. "During my visits to the United States," he wrote, "I have met with thousands of people, among them priests, rabbis, spiritual teachers, professors, students, artists, musicians—people from all walks of life, men and women of all ages. Some came from far corners of this great country, from California, Texas and Alaska. I have observed these people one by one: they are all lovers of God, Glorified and Exalted is He. In heart and form they are as pure, as clean, and as beautiful as their faces show. The Lord has granted them the blessing of wisdom. Their character is manifest in their appearance. They turned our every meeting into a garden of paradise, watered by the rain of Divine Mercy. Without exception they wanted to know about the True Beloved. They were longing to speak with me of God and Love …"

It was indeed a great Love Affair, and one that did not end when Sheikh Muzaffer's triumphantly loving spirit was called—in the language of the Irshād—to emigrate from this lower world to the Realm of Divine Beauty. Many Americans, whose hearts he had stolen, were among the vast throng attending his funeral rites in Istanbul in 1985. Their love for "Efendi", shared by countless others who met him even briefly, continues to enrich their own lives, and the lives of those around them.

SHEIKH MUZAFFER'S LITERARY WORKS

The original Turkish edition of the Irshād was published in Istanbul, as a 3-volume work (1974, 1978, 1978) totalling over 1500 pages. This volume has been edited for the English audience with permission of the author.

The Unveiling of Love ("Ashk Yolu Vuslat Tariki"). English translation by Muhtar Holland. Published by Inner Traditions International, New York, 1981.*

The first of Sheikh Muzaffer's works to achieve publication in English, The Unveiling of Love is dedicated by the author "to Nur Lex Hixon for all American lovers [of the Truth]." According to a reviewer in Nuradeen Magazine, the book "reveals the ecstasy of the sufic path of Islam through the inspired words of a living Master, whose love of Allah shines out on every page."

Envâr-ül-Kulûb ("Lights of the Hearts"). A 3-volume work in Turkish, published in Istanbul, 1975, 1977, 1979. The twenty-eight Discourses are in a style similar to that of the Irshād. To be published by Pir Publications, Connecticut.

Ziynet-ül-Kulûb ("Adornment of Hearts"). Turkish edition, Istanbul, 1973. English translation by Muhtar Holland. Published in three parts: "Adornment of Hearts," "Ashki's Divan," and "Garden of Dervishes." Published by Pir Publications, Connecticut, 1992.

The Turkish edition contains all the essential elements of Sufi teachings in concise form, including the “litanies” (evrad/awrād) of the major Sufi Orders. It is presently being translated and will be published by Pir Publications, Connecticut.

Gülzar-i Arifan (“Rose Garden of the Wise”). A short work, published in Istanbul some years ago, containing hymns and odes, songs of praise of the Prophet Muhammad composed by the great spiritual Masters and Sheikhs of the mystic orders, including the hymns that Sheikh Muzaffer composed himself.

Hazret-i Meryem (“Blessed Virgin Mary”). Unpublished in Turkey; English translation by Muhtar Holland. Published by Pir Publications, Connecticut, 1992.

A short treatise, written with a view of fostering improved relations through mutual respect and understanding between Muslims and Christians. Sheikh Muzaffer extols the noble virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as he tells her story in the light of the Holy Qur’ān and the religious tradition of Islam.

Sofiyye Sohbetleri (“Garden of Dervishes”). Unpublished in Turkey; English translation by Muhtar Holland. Published by Pir Publications, Connecticut, 1992.*

A short but invaluable work. Subjects treated include: Human Destiny: The Degrees of Knowledge; The Degrees of Renunciation; The Importance of

Dreams; The Spiritual Path in the Time of the Prophet; Role of the Spiritual Guide; Love and Affection; Mineral, Vegetable, Animal and Human Levels; The Five Souls or Spirits; The Four Gates and Forty Stages on the Way of Truth …

Halvetiler ve Halvetilik ("Halvetis and the Halveti Order"). Unpublished work incorporating the History of the Jerrahi Order.

*During his final visit to the United States, Sheikh Muzaffer hinted at the existence of other incomplete writings, including additional materials for the Garden of Dervishes. It remains to be seen whether any such manuscripts or typescripts may be discovered.

THE MEANING OF IRSHAD

The Arabic word irshād is a verbal noun derived from the tri-consonantal root R-Sh-D. The corresponding active participle is murshid. (From the root S-L-M, the same patterns give rise to Islām/Muslim.)

Words based on R-Sh-D convey various aspects of the central concept "being on the right track." Internally, the idea extends toward "maturity; the intellectual, moral and spiritual development equipping an individual to live a truly human life."

The following terms may serve to illustrate the ramification of the root concept:

RASHĀD: pursuing a straight course; correct belief and practice in accordance with the teachings of Islam.

RUSHD: maturity; coming of age, attaining the age of discretion. RASHID: of correct conduct based on sound judgement; righteous; adult. ar-Rashīd is one of the Divine Names, interpreted as meaning: "The One who moves all things in accordance with His eternal plan, bringing them unerringly and with order and wisdom to their ultimate destiny."

RASHĪD: well-directed; rightly guided.

Applied in the plural form (Rāshidūn/-īn) to the Caliphs considered "Rightly Guided" in their conduct as leaders of the Muslim community (especially the first four Caliphs: the venerable Abū Bakr, °Umar, °Uthmān and °Alī).

MURSHID: guiding to the right path; spiritual guide.

The qualities and qualifications of the Murshid, and the importance of his role, are discussed at great length in the literature of Sufism, where the emphasis is sometimes 'practical' (relating to the practices favored by a particular Order) and sometimes more 'mystical' (relating to spiritual hierarchies, for instance).

Sheikh Muzaffer writes in The Garden of the Dervishes:

Certain individuals have as their spiritual guide (murshid) the Divine Truth in Person. A member of this special group is termed “Uwaysī.” Another special class consists of those honored beings who are endowed with spiritual grace under the auspices of departed Saints. Such people have no more formal learning than a new-born baby. Without taking lessons from anyone, they receive divine guidance directly and through the spiritual influence of the Saints, the intimate friends of the Truth.

For ordinary folk, however, there is no substitute for a murshid to show the true path. It behooves us to submit our imperfect selves to the treatment prescribed by this guide, to cleanse our passionate nature, to purify the heart, to love Allah, and to work for admission to His presence by following in the radiant footsteps of His Messenger.

IRSHĀD: giving direction, showing the right way to proceed; moral, religious, spiritual guidance; enlightenment, development of mature humanity.

In Sufi contexts, the term is sometimes used in specific ‘technical’ senses, including: 1) initiation into membership of a particular Order; 2) authorization to initiate and supervise the progress of Sufi aspirants; to become a murshid in one’s own right.

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We can achieve nothing without the help and guidance of Allah, Glorious and Exalted is He.

May we ever enjoy His blessing and protection, Amen.

Muhtar Holland, al-Hajj

THE FIRST DISCOURSE

The Beautiful Names of Allāh

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

The Existence of Allāh; His infinite Power and Compassion;

The Mystery of the Supreme Name.

The Meaning and peculiar Benefit of each of the Ninety-Nine Names.

Evidence of Allāh's Existence.

The Divine Attributes and Qualities.

True Faith, Belief in the Unseen,

Fear of Allāh and Love of Allāh.

Praise be to Allāh, Who has made us Muslim counselors and guides, and Who has given us understanding of the knowledge conferred upon sincere and learned scholars. Blessings and peace upon our master and guide, Muhammad, most perfect of the Messengers, seal of the Prophets and leader of the righteous, and on his family, his offspring, his wives, his companions, his helpers, and all who love him.

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THE EXISTENCE OF ALLĀH; HIS INFINITE POWER AND COMPASSION; THE MYSTERY OF THE SUPREME BEING

ALLĀH

— Glorious is His Majesty —

Allāh exists. He is One, without partner or peer. It is He Who creates all things, Who grants the supplication of the supplicant, Who causes death, Who brings to life, Who nourishes. It is He Who exalts, and Who abases. It is He Who humbles the mighty, and Who exalts the humble. It is He Who separates night from day, and day from night. He is the First of the first, the Last of the last. He it is Who rules as He wills. He knows and sees the secret lovers. Time does not affect Him. He does not age. He never sleeps. He causes death, yet does not die. He gives to eat, yet does not eat. He brings to birth, yet is not born. He has no need of anything, yet everything needs Him. He is without place, yet no place is devoid of Him. Of every act

He is the author. He alone is worthy of worship; there is no other deity. On earth, in heaven, and in the worlds unseen, whatever exists is His property, His creature. He brings at once into being whatever He wills, and whatever He wills He brings at once to naught. He is most Compassionate. In a Sacred Tradition, He gladdens sinners with the good news: “My mercy has outstripped My wrath.” Such is His mercy that He will pardon disobedience, infidel ity and sin against Himself, if only the offender will repent and show remorse. He is Generous. He does not withhold His gifts from the irreligious, the erring, the sinners who know Him not; He grants them sustenance, and if they turn to Him there is no sin He will not pardon. He promises in His Holy Qur’ān:

Say: “O My servants who have trangressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of Allāh; surely Allāh forgives sins altogether; He is indeed Forgiving, Merciful.” [39:53]

And in another Verse:

Allāh does not forgive that anything be associated with Him; all else He forgives to whom He will. Whoever associates anything with Allāh has surely forged a mighty sin. [4:48]

Fellow believers, companions on the way of Truth, let us love our Lord, and voice our praise of Him while we may, before a dreadful death overtakes us, before we enter the abode of solitude, before we stand face to face with our own deeds, before we suffer shame and disgrace, before we lose our children and wives, before we make enemies of our loved ones, families and friends, before our lips are sealed and our sight extinguished, before we turn toward the tomb and see the flames of hellfire.

We always remember the One we love. We would not offend our Beloved whose every command we accept with grateful joy and delight. If we love Him, He loves us too; if we praise Him, He praises us in turn. As we walk toward Him, He comes running to us.

He is closer to us than our own soul; it is we who are far from Him. As He is near to us, so let us strive to be near to Him. All that has ever been said or written about Him is but a drop in the ocean, an atom of the sun. All beauty belongs to Him; all beautiful names are His. He is our Lord and the Lord of all that exists.

May He not dismiss us from His service; may He never cast us out! Where should we find refuge? Where should we take shelter? Only the Truth is permanent and everlasting. May He keep us forever in His presence and in His service. It is far better to serve in His presence than to reign like a king without Him.

THE MEANING AND PECULIAR BENEFIT OF EACH OF THE NINETY-NINE NAMES

The exalted Creator is said to have three thousand names. One thousand are known only to the Angels. Another thousand only the Prophets know. There are three hundred in the Torah, three hundred in the Psalms, three hundred in the Gospel, and ninety-nine in the Holy Qur’ān. One name is kept secret by the Almighty Lord. This is called the Supreme Name, to signify that one Name is unique to Him, and remains hidden within His Essence.

Our beloved Prophet has also told us about the Supreme Name in his noble sayings, the Hadīth. According to Asmā', the blessed Prophet said: "The Supreme Name of Allāh is in these two Verses of the Holy Qur'ān:

Your God is One God [Wahīd], There is no god but He [Hū], All-Merciful [Rahmān] and Compassionate [Rahīm]. [2:163].

Alif Lām Mīm. Allāh, there is no god but He [Hū], the Living [Hayy], the Self-Subsisting [Qayyūm]. [3:1-2].

"And in:

Faces shall be humbled to the Living [Hayy], the Self-Subsisting [Qayyūm], He who bears evil will have failed. [20:111]."

It is also reported, on the authority of the venerable °Ā'isha, that the Supreme Name is Yā Rabb, Yā Rabb (Lord, Lord!).

Out of compassion, Allāh keeps certain things concealed. He conceals His intimate friends, the saints, so that we may all respect one another. He has concealed the Night of Power in the month of Ramadān, so that people will avoid wickedness and devote themselves to worship on every night of this sacred month. He does not reveal which act of worship He most favors, so that all His sacred laws shall be observed. He has hidden His Supreme Name in the Glorious Qur'ān, so that His servants should read it all. Anyone who reads the Qur'ān from beginning to end will come across this Supreme Name, but without realizing he has done so.

We have listed the ninety-nine Names mentioned in the Holy Qur’ān. Be sure to learn them by heart. Allāh does not need you to remember His Names; it is you who are needy. So memorize, but do not stop at the Names: Find the Named One. For those who know Him by heart, His beloved Messenger tells us, there is no Hell but only Paradise.

The great Saint °Abdu’l-Ahad al-Nūrī sings in a hymn of praise:

Sufi, rest not at the Names;

Come learn Whose Names they are.

To know the Named One, that’s the aim,

The only aim in studying the Names.

Allāh the All-Glorious says: “If you call upon Me with these Names, I shall answer your call.”

ALLĀH

The One Almighty God. He Alone is Worthy of Worship.

AR-RAHMĀN: The All-Merciful. He who wills goodness and mercy for all His creatures from all eternity, excluding none from His infinite bounty.

YĀ RAHMĀNU: O All-Merciful One! If repeated one hundred times after each obligatory prayer, this invocation provides a safeguard against heedlessness, forget fulness and anxiety.

AR-RAHĪM: The Compassionate. He who acts with extreme kindness. He recompenses those who put to good use the benefits He bestows on them, by giving them yet greater and everlasting benefits.

YĀ RAHĪMU: O Compassionate One! By repeating this invocation one hundred times after the early morning prayer, one will attract kind and friendly treatment from all creatures.

AL-MALIK: The Sovereign Lord. He who is Absolute Ruler of the entire universe.

YĀ MALIKU: O Sovereign Lord! Those who repeat this constantly have nothing to fear from any authority in this world or the Next. They will enjoy respect and dignity in the sight of others.

AL-QUDDŪS: The Holy One. He who is free from all error, absentmindedness, incapacity or deficiency. He is Most Pure.

YĀ QUDDŪSU: O Holy One! If we repeat this one hundred times each day, our hearts will be pure and cleansed of all anxiety.

AS-SALĀM: The Source of Peace. He who frees His servants from all danger and obstruction. He greets His fortunate servants in Paradise.

YĀ SALĀMU: O Source of Peace! If this is repeated one hundred and sixty times over someone who is ill, it will help the patient to recover.

AL-MU’MIN: The Guardian of Faith. He who awakens the light of faith in our hearts. He protects and comforts those who shelter with Him.

YĀ MU’MINU: O Guardian of Faith! If we repeat this constantly, the Exalted Lord will make us safe against the evil of the foe.

AL-MUHAYMIN: The Protector. He who watches over and protects all things.

YĀ MUHAYMINU: O Protector! When this invocation is made after complete ablution, one’s inner being becomes radiant.

AL-°AZĪZ: The Almighty. He who prevails, and can never be conquered.

YĀ °AZĪZU: O Almighty One! If we recite this after the early morning prayer, forty times each day for forty days, the Exalted Lord will free us from dependence on others.

AL-JABBĀR: The Compeller. He who repairs all broken things, and completes that which is incomplete. He is able to compel the execution of His will.

YĀ JABBĀRU: O Compeller! Those who repeat this invocation will not be subjected to coercion, and will not be exposed to violence, severity or harshness.

AL-MUTAKABBIR: The Majestic. He who demonstrates His greatness in all things and in all ways.

YĀ MUTAKABBIRU: O Majestic One! The Exalted Lord will grant righteous children to men who repeat this before approaching their wives.

AL-KHĀLIQ: The Creator. He who brings from non-being into being, creating all things in such a way that He determines their existence and the conditions and events they are to experience.

YĀ KHĀLIQU: O Creator! For one who repeats this invocation at night, Allāh creates an angel; that angel worships obediently until the Day of Resurrection, and its reward is credited to the person concerned.

AL-BĀRI’: The Evolver. O Evolver who created all things so that each whole and its parts are in perfect conformity and harmony.

YĀ BĀRI’U: O Evolver!

AL-MUSAWWIR: The Shaper. He who designs all things, giving each its particular form and character.

YĀ MUSAWWIRU: O Shaper! Advice to a childless wife who wishes to bear children: The Exalted Lord will grant her a child if she fasts for seven days, breaking her fast at the proper time each day with a glass of water, over which she has breathed after reciting twenty-one times: YĀ KHĀLIQU, YĀ BĀRI’U, YĀ MUSAWWIRU (O Creator! O Maker! O Shaper!)

AL-GHAFFĀR: The Forgiver. He who is always ready to forgive.

YĀ GHAFFĀRU: O Forgiver! Allāh graciously forgives the sins of those who call upon Him constantly by this Name.

AL-QAHHĀR: The Subduer. He who dominates all things, and prevails upon them to do whatever He wills.

YĀ QAHHĀRU: O Subduer! This invocation helps one to subdue the desires of the flesh, ridding the heart of worldly attachment and leading to inner peace. The recitation of this Name also affords protection against cruel injustice.

AL-WAHHĀB: The Bestower. He who constantly bestows blessings of every kind.

YĀ WAHHĀBU: O Bestower! If you repeat this seven times after making a supplication, your plea will be accepted. If one has a particular wish, or is held captive by an enemy, or finds it hard to make ends meet, one should invoke this Name one hundred times after midnight on three or seven nights (following ablution and a ritual prayer of two cycles). Allāh will then grant whatever one needs.

AR-RAZZĀQ: The Provider. He who provides all things useful to His creatures.

YĀ RAZZĀQU: O Provider! The gates of providence are open for those who constantly repeat this glorious Name.

AL-FATTĀH: The Opener. He who opens the solution to all problems and makes things easy.

YĀ FATTĀHU: O Opener! The repetition of this Name brings openness of heart, and opens the way to victory.

AL-°ALĪM: The All-Knowing. He who has full knowledge of all things.

YĀ °ALĪMU: O All-Knowing One! Our hearts are illumined by invocation of this glorious Name, and many qualities of light shine from within us.

AL-QĀBID: The Constrictor. He who constricts and restricts.

YĀ QĀBIDU: O Constrictor! If, for forty days, one eats fifty morsels on which this glorious Name has been written, one will never suffer starvation.

AL-BĀSIT: The Expander. He who releases, letting things expand.

YĀ BĀSITU: O Expander! If, before dawn, you invoke this glorious Name ten times, holding up your open palms and then drawing them down over your face, you will not stand in need of other people.

AL-KHĀFID: The Abaser. He who brings down, diminishes.

YĀ KHĀFIDU: O Abaser! To obtain Divine protection against the evil of the foe, one should invoke this Name seventy thousand times in a religious gathering, on the day following a three-day fast.

AR-RĀFI°: The Exalter. He who raises up.

YĀ RĀFI°U: O Exalter! To those who invoke this Name one hundred times day and night, Allāh grants superiority in respect of honor, virtue and wealth.

AL-MU°IZZ: The Honorer He who confers honor and dignity.

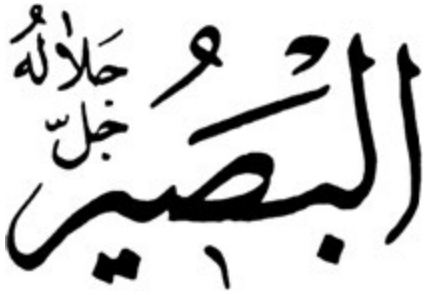
YĀ MU°IZZU: O Honorer! Allāh grants dignity to those who invoke this Name one hundred and forty times after the late prayer on Monday or Friday, and they will have nothing to fear but the Exalted Truth.

AL-MUDHILL: The Dishonorer. He who degrades and abases.

YĀ MUDHILLU: O Dishonorer! To those who wish to be safe from cruel and envious people, Allāh will grant protection after they have invoked this Name seventy- five times.

AS-SAMĪ°: The All-Hearing.

YĀ SAMĪ°U: O All-Hearing One! Allāh takes care of all the needs of those who invoke this glorious Name one hundred times after the early forenoon prayer on Thursday, before speaking to anyone.



AL-BASĪR: The All-Seeing.

YĀ BASĪRU: O All-Seeing One! To those who invoke this Name one hundred times between the obligatory and customary prayers in Friday congregation, Allāh grants esteem in the eyes of others.

AL-HAKAM: The Judge. He who judges and makes right prevail.

YĀ HAKAMU: O Judge! Allāh reveals many mysteries to those who invoke this glorious Name many times at night.

AL-°ADL: The Just. He who is very Equitable.

YĀ °ADLU: O Just One! The Exalted Lord makes everyone obedient to those who write this Name on a piece of bread and eat it on a Friday night.

AL-LATĪF: The Subtle. He who knows the minutest subtleties of all things. He imperceptibly fashions the greatest refinements, and gently and inconspicuously extends all kinds of benefits to His servants.

YĀ LATĪFU: O Subtle One! If a poor and lonely person invokes this glorious Name one hundred times after performing a prayer of two cycles, all his wishes will be fulfilled.

AL-KHABĪR: The Aware. He who has knowledge of the inner, most secret aspects of all things.

YĀ KHABĪRU: O Aware One! By constant invocation of this glorious Name, those who suffer from bad habits will soon find them corrected.

AL-HALĪM: The Forbearing. He who is Most Clement.

YĀ HALĪMU: O Forbearing One! If a farmer writes this glorious Name on a piece of paper, and leaves it where he has sown his seed, no harm or misfortune will befall his crops.

AL-°AZĪM: The Magnificent. He who is Most Splendid.

YĀ °AZĪMU: O Magnificent One! Love and respect will attend those who frequently invoke this glorious Name.

AL-GHAFŪR: The All-Forgiving.

YĀ GHAFŪRU: O All-Forgiving One! The constant invocation of this glorious Name will bring relief to those who suffer from fever and migraine, or who experience grief and sorrow.

ASH-SHAKŪR: The Appreciative. He who gratefully rewards good deeds.

YĀ SHAKŪRU: O Appreciative One! If your life is hard and painful, you should wash your face with water over which you have repeated this Name forty-nine times; you will then achieve your goals.

AL-°ALĪ: The Most High.

YĀ °ALĪYU: O Most High! Improvement comes with constant invocation of this name; if fortune’s door is closed, it will be opened, and travelers will soon reach home again.

AL-KABĪR: The Great. He who is supremely Great.

YĀ KABĪRU: O Great One! Those who invoke this glorious Name one hundred times a day will come to be highly honored.

AL-HAFĪZ: The Preserver. He who guards all creatures in every detail, preserving everything from calamity and misfortune until its appointed time.

YĀ HAFĪZU: O Preserver! Those who invoke this glorious Name sixteen times a day will be kept safe from disasters.

AL-MUQĪT: The Sustainer. He who gives every creature its sustenance.

YĀ MUQĪTU: O Sustainer! Badly behaved children will improve, if they are made to drink water from a glass over which this Name has been recited.

AL-HASĪB: The Reckoner. He who knows in every detail and particular the account of all our deeds and actions throughout our lives.

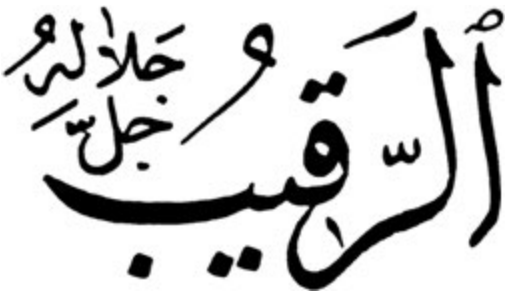
YĀ HASĪBU: O Reckoner! For protection against thieves, the evil eye, or harm from an enemy, invoke this glorious Name seventy times, day and night, for seven days beginning on a Thursday. After every seventy invocations, add the words: hasbiya'llāhu'l-hasīb ("Sufficient for me is Allāh, the Reckoner.")

AL-JALĪL: The Sublime. He who is Lord of Majesty and Grandeur.

YĀ JALĪLU: O Sublime One! You will be revered among men if you write this glorious Name in musk and saffron, wash off the writing, then drink the liquid from a ceramic container.

AL-KARĪM: The Generous. He whose generosity is most abundant.

YĀ KARĪMU: O Generous One! Those who constantly invoke this glorious Name will be esteemed in this world and in the Hereafter.



AR-RAQĪB: The Watchful. He who watches vigilantly over the whole universe, all things being subject to His control.

YĀ RAQĪBU: O Watchful One! Allāh’s protection is assured to those who invoke this Name seven times, over themselves, their children, their families and their property.

AL-MUJĪB: The Responsive. He who grants the wishes of those who appeal to Him.

YĀ MUJĪBU: O Responsive One! Those who invoke this glorious Name will find their supplications granted.

AL-WĀSI°: The All-Embracing. He who has limitless capacity and abundance.

YĀ WĀSI°U: O All-Embracing One! If this glorious Name is invoked by those who experience difficulty in making ends meet, the gates of providence will be opened unto them.

AL-HAKĪM: The Wise. He whose every command and action is pure wisdom.

YĀ HAKĪMU: O Wise One! For those who constantly invoke this glorious Name, all their endeavors turn out well.

AL-WADŪD: The Loving. He who loves His good servants, and bestows his compassion upon them. He alone deserves to be loved and to be gained as a friend.

YĀ WADŪDU: O Loving One! Any misunderstanding between two people will be removed, if one of them invokes this glorious Name one thousand times over some food, then gives it to the other to eat.

AL-MAJĪD: The Glorious. He whose glory is most great and most high.

YĀ MAJĪDU: O Glorious One! Those who constantly invoke this Name will always be eminent.

AL-BĀ°ITH: The Resurrector. He who brings the dead to life, and raises them from their tombs.

YĀ BĀ°ITHU: O Resurrector! Fear of Allāh will inspire those who invoke this glorious Name.

ASH-SHAHĪD: The Witness. He who is present everywhere and observes all things.

YĀ SHAHĪDU: O Witness! Disobedient children will pay attention to what they are told, if this Name is recited over them.

AL-HAQQ: Truth. He whose being endures unchangingly.

YĀ HAQQU: O Truth! If you have lost something, you will find it by invoking this Name.

AL-WAKĪL: The Trustee. He who manages the affairs of those who duly commit them to His charge, and who looks after them better than they could themselves.

YĀ WAKĪLU: O Trustee! By constantly invoking this Name, one comes to enjoy the protection of Allāh against the perils of water, fire, or any other threat.

AL-QAWĪ: The Most Strong.

YĀ QAWĪYU: O Most Strong! An invocation to ward off harm from a superior foe.

AL-MATĪN: The Firm. He who is very Steadfast.

YĀ MATĪNU: O Firm One! Difficult tasks become easy for those who invoke this Name.

AL-WALĪ: The Protecting Friend. He who is a friend to His good servants.

YĀ WALĪYU: O Protecting Friend! Those who constantly invoke this Name may hope to become the friends of Allāh.

AL-HAMĪD: The Praiseworthy. He to whom all praise belongs, and who alone is lauded by the tongues of all creation.

YĀ HAMĪDU: O Praiseworthy One! Those who invoke this glorious Name will earn people’s love and approval.

AL-MUHSĪ: The Reckoner. He who knows the number of every single thing in existence, even to infinity.

YĀ MUHSĪ: O Reckoner! If those who fear the Final Reckoning invoke this Name one thousand times, it will become easier for them to render account.

AL-MUBDI’: The Originator. He who creates all creation ab initio without matter or model.

YĀ MUBDI’U: O Originator! If this Name is invoked over a woman who is threatening to miscarry, she will be spared the dangers of pregnancy.

AL-MU°ĪD: The Restorer. He who recreates His creatures after He has annihilated them.

YĀ MU°ĪDU: O Restorer! Invoke this glorious Name seventy times to ensure the safe return of an absent member of the family.

AL-MUHYĪ: The Giver of Life. He who confers life, gives vitality, revives.

YĀ MUHYĪ: O Giver of Life! For relief from a crushing burden, invoke this Name seven times daily.

AL-MUMĪT: The Creator of Death. He who creates the death of a living creature.

YĀ MUMĪTU: O Creator of Death! May be invoked to bring about the destruction of one’s enemy.

AL-HAYY: The Living. The Ever-Living, who knows all things and whose strength is sufficient for everything.

YĀ HAYYU: O Living One! Long life will be enjoyed by those who constantly invoke this Name.

AL-QAYYŪM: The Self-Subsisting. He who maintains the heavens, the earth, and everything that exists.

YĀ QAYYŪMU: O Self-Subsisting One! Those who invoke this Name will not lapse into heedlessness.

AL-WĀJID: The Finder. He who finds what He wishes when He wishes.

YĀ WĀJIDU: O Finder! Those who invoke this Name are favored with richness of heart.

AL-MĀJID: The Noble. He whose dignity and glory are most great, and whose generosity and munificence are bountiful.

YĀ MĀJIDU: O Noble One! The hearts of those who invoke this Name will be enlightened.

AL-WĀHID: The Unique. He who is Single, absolutely without partner or equal in His Essence, Attributes, Actions, Names, and Decrees.

YĀ WĀHIDU: O Unique One! Those who frequently invoke this glorious Name, alone in a quiet place, become immune to fear and delusion.

AL-AHAD: The One.

YĀ AHADU: O One! Certain mysteries are revealed to those who invoke this Name one thousand times.

AS-SAMAD: The Eternal. He who is the only recourse for the ending of need and the removal of affliction.

YĀ SAMADU: O Eternal One! Allāh will meet all the needs of one who frequently invokes this glorious Name, and that person will find that others need him.

AL-QĀDIR: The All-Capable. He who is Able to do what He wills as He wills.

YĀ QĀDIRU: O All-Capable One! Those who invoke this Name will find all their wishes fulfilled.

AL-MUQTADIR: The All-Powerful. He who disposes at His will even of the strongest and mightiest of His creatures.

YĀ MUQTADIRU: O All-Powerful One! Those who often invoke this Name will awake from heedless sleep.

AL-MUQADDIM: The Accelerator. He who brings forward whatever He wills.

YĀ MUQADDIMU: O Accelerator! No harm will befall those who invoke this Name, whether on the battlefield or in any dangerous place.

AL-MU’AKHKHIR: The Delayer. He who sets back or delays whatever He wills.

YĀ MU’AKHKHIRU: O Delayer! No love but the love of Allāh will take root in the heart of one who recites this Name one hundred times a day.

AL-AWWAL: The First.

YĀ AWWALU: O First! If you wish to have children, or to be united with an absent relative, invoke this Name one thousand times on forty Fridays.

AL-ĀKHIR: The Last.

YĀ ĀKHIRU: O Last! Those who often invoke this glorious Name will live and die well.

AZ-ZĀHIR: The Manifest. He who is Evident.

YĀ ZĀHIRU. O Manifest One! Inner enlightenment will come to those who invoke this Name fifteen times after congregational prayer on Friday.

AL-BĀTIN: The Hidden. He who is hidden, concealed.

YĀ BĀTINU: O Hidden One! Those who invoke this Name, three times a day, will come to recognize the reality of things.

AL-WĀLĪ: The Governor. He who administers this vast universe and all its passing phenomena.

YĀ WĀLĪ: O Governor! Those who invoke this Name over their houses, will dwell safely therein.

AL-MUTA°ĀLĪ: The Most Exalted. He who is Exalted in every respect, far beyond anything the mind could possibly attribute to His creatures.

YĀ MUTA°ĀLĪ: O Most Exalted One! By frequent invocation of this Name, one attracts Divine benevolence.

AL BARR: Source of all Goodness. He who treats His servants tolerantly, and whose goodness and kindness are very great indeed.

YĀ BARRU: O Source of all Goodness! Children are safe from misfortune when this glorious Name has been recited over them.

AT-TAWWĀB: The Acceptor of Repentance. He who is ever ready to accept repentance and to forgive sins.

YĀ TAWWĀBU: O Acceptor of Repentance! Repentance will be accepted of those who often invoke this Name.

AL-MUNTAQIM: The Avenger. He who justly inflicts upon wrongdoers the punishment they deserve.

YĀ MUNTAQIMU: O Avenger! Those who frequently invoke this Name will be victorious over their enemies.

AL-°AFŪW: The Pardoner. He who pardons all who sincerely repent.

YĀ °AFŪWU: O Pardoner! Those who often invoke this Name will have all their sins forgiven.

AR-RA’ŪF: The Kind. He who is very Compassionate.

YĀ RA’ŪFU: O Kind One! Great is the good fortune of those who invoke this Name.

MĀLIKU’L-MULK: The Lord of Sovereignty. He who is the Eternal Owner of Sovereignty.

YĀ MĀLIKA’L-MULK: O Lord of Sovereignty! One who often invokes this Name will be mighty among men.

DHU’L-JALĀLI WA’L-IKRĀM: The Lord of Majesty and Bounty. He who possesses both greatness and gracious magnanimity.

YĀ DHA’L-JALĀLI WA’L-IKRĀM: O Lord of Majesty and Bounty! Those who often invoke this glorious Name will become rich.

AL-MUQSIT: The Equitable. He who does everything with proper balance and harmony.

YĀ MUQSITU: O Equitable One! Frequent invocation of this Name gives protection from the mischief of the devil.

AL-JĀMI°: The Gatherer. He who brings together what He wills, when He wills, where He wills.

YĀ JĀMI°U: O Gatherer! One who invokes this Name will quickly find a thing that he has lost.

AL-GHĀNĪ: The Self-Sufficient. He who is infinitely Rich and completely Independent.

YĀ GHANĪYU: O Self-Sufficient! One who invokes this glorious Name will achieve contentment.

AL MUGHNĪ: The Enricher. He who enriches whom He will.

YĀ MUGHNĪYU: O Enricher! One who invokes this Name, ten times on each of ten Fridays, will become independent of others.

AL-MĀNI°: The Preventer.

YĀ MĀNI°U: O Preventer! Those who invoke this Name will enjoy peace and harmony in their married life.

AD-DĀRR: The Distresser. He who creates things that cause pain and injury.

YĀ DĀRRU: O Distresser! If this Name is invoked, on Friday nights, by those who have fallen to the bottom of the scale, they will rise to higher status.

AN-NĀFI°: The Beneficent. He who creates things that yield advantage and benefit.

YĀ NĀFI°U: O Beneficent! No injury or pain will afflict those who recite this glorious Name, as many times as they can in the course of four days.

AN-NŪR: Light. He who gives light to all the worlds, who illuminates the faces, minds and hearts of His servants.

YĀ NŪRU: O Light! Those who invoke this glorious Name will be inwardly enlightened.

AL-HĀDĪ: The Guide. He who provides guidance. When He wills, He directs His servants into good and profitable paths, and leads them to their goal.

YĀ HĀDĪ: O Guide! Spiritual knowledge will be acquired by those who invoke this Name.

AL-BADĪ°: The Incomparable. He who is without model or match, and who brings into being worlds of amazing wonder.

YĀ BADĪ°U: O Incomparable One! All troubles are eased for those who invoke this glorious Name, seventy times in the form: yā badi°a ‘s-samāwati wa’l-ard (“O Incomparable Creator of the Heavens and the Earth!”).

AL-BĀQĪ: The Everlasting. He whose existence is without end.

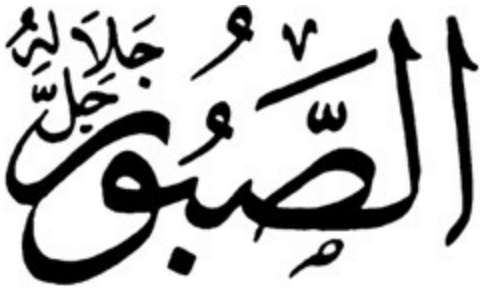
YĀ BĀQĪ: O Everlasting One! One who invokes this Name one hundred times before sunrise, will enjoy lifelong immunity from disaster, and will be shown mercy in the Hereafter.

AL-WĀRITH: The Inheritor. He who is the Real Owner of all riches. His wealth endures, while even the richest mortals must one day leave all their wealth behind.

YĀ WĀRITHU: O Inheritor! Long life will be enjoyed by those who often invoke this Name.

AR-RASHĪD: The Director. He who moves all things in accordance with His eternal plan, bringing them unerringly and with order and wisdom to their ultimate destiny.

YĀ RASHĪDU: O Director! Difficulties will be resolved for those who invoke this glorious Name one thousand times between the evening and night prayers.



AS-SABŪR: The Patient. He who is characterized by infinite patience.

YĀ SABŪRU: O Patient One! For relief from trouble or confusion, one should invoke this glorious Name three thousand times.

* * *

If we use the Most Beautiful Names in our prayers of supplication, our pleas are sure of divine acceptance, for Allāh—Glorious is His Majesty—says: “Call upon Me by these Names of Mine.”

None can prevail against Allāh. He prevails over all things, and is Sufficient unto Himself. He answers the prayers of those who call on Him, and He is Aware of all their inner thoughts.

Keep your words private or speak openly,

He knows what your breasts contain. [67:13]

To Allāh Most High belongs all sovereignty. To Him exclusively all praise is due. He is the cause of life and death, yet He never dies. He is Living, He is Alive. He is Eternal, Everlasting, Enduring. All goodness lies in His Almighty Hand. All is within His Power, and everything must return to Him.

All Worlds between heaven and earth, known and unknown, belong to Him. His sanctified and blessed Essence is pure of all resemblance and comparison. His marvels testify to His Godhead. His works are proof of His Oneness.

EVIDENCE OF ALLĀH'S EXISTENCE

If our eyes alight upon some material object, curiosity makes us ask ourselves four questions about it, namely: (i) What is it made of? (ii) How is it formed? (iii) Why was it made? (iv) Who made it?

Faced with a clock, for instance, you will note that it is made of metal, that its form is circular, and that its purpose is to tell the time. You cannot answer the fourth question—who made it?—because you have not seen the craftsman. But do you therefore deny the existence of the clock-maker?

An Arab tribesman was asked about the existence of the Lord God. "When we see a camel's footprints in the sand," he replied, "we know that a camel has passed that way."

When someone says: “Since I exist there must also exist some Powerful and Mighty Being who brought me into existence,” he has perceived that his own existence is proof of the existence of God. For nothing comes into being just by itself. It absolutely must have a maker. And that is undoubtedly and unquestionably Allāh, Exalted is He.

Everything in the universe, every single thing is a faithful witness to the existence of the Truth. Let us survey this stunning and amazing miracle:

First there is the firmament of Heaven. Just think of that vast enormous sky with its sun, its moon, its stars and other entities beyond our sight and ken. Man is not able to control even the moon, closest of the heavenly bodies. And yet the sun rises and sets, the moon comes out and disappears from view. Day gives way to night, the nights turn into day. The months and the seasons change and all these things run their course with the same regularity throughout the centuries in complete and absolute order, unerring, undeviating. All these things we see and know Even if we cannot see their Creator, may we deny His existence?

He it is Who made the sun a radiance and the moon a light, assigning to it stations so that you might know the number of the years and how to reckon. Allāh did not create this other than in truth, spelling out His signs for people who know. Surely in the alternation of night and day, and in what Allāh has created in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for those who are aware of Him. [10:5-6]

The second miracle is this world of ours. Let your gaze survey the surface of this earth. Look at the mountains, the oceans, the deserts, the lakes, the trees, the flora and fauna, the people. Behold this great world with all its abundance. See that huge elephant, meekly allowing itself to be led by a

five-year old child; or that herd of water buffalo, so tame that a ten-year old boy can drive them any way he chooses … . When we behold these creatures, can we deny the existence of their Maker and Creator, merely on the grounds that we have never seen Him?

Have they not seen that We have created for them—among the things Our hands have fashioned—cattle of which they are the masters? We have subdued them for them, so that some of them they have to ride on, and some to eat. They have other uses in them too, and things to drink. So will they not be thankful? [36:71-73]

The third miracle requires that we examine ourselves. How beautifully we have been created! Our eyes see, our ears hear, our hands hold, our feet walk. We have been given a mind with power to comprehend, as well as limbs with which to work. When we look at a statue by a famous sculptor, or a picture by a famous painter, we do not need to see the artist in order to assess his skill. It would be absurd for us to deny his existence. Should we then deny the existence of the unseen Creator Who brought that artist into being, and Who gave him his mind and skill, his hands and fingers?

Deniers deny themselves, not the Truth. People of sound reason perceive the Truth in an atom; far from denying, they confirm it, as they marvel at this divine work. In fact, the very denial of the denier proves the existence of the Truth. What is not does not exist, and thus what is becomes apparent. The believer sees the recompense of his belief in this world and the Next, just as the denier meets the penalty for his denial both here and in the Hereafter.

Allāh says in His Glorious Qur’ān:

Will they not consider how the camel was created, how heaven was raised, how the mountains were set up, how the earth was spread? Then remind them! You are only a reminder. [88:17-21]

Our Master, the Most Noble Messenger, said: “One hour spent in contemplation [tafakkur] is better than sixty years of supererogatory worship.” As there are sixty minutes in an hour, one minute in contemplation is therefore equal to a year of worship. Indeed contemplation is the highest form of worship. The most veracious Abū Bakr, may Allāh be pleased with him, said: “Before perceiving anything I see in it the Power of Allāh.”

* * *

The three miraculous signs mentioned above are termed, respectively, the cosmic [āfāqīya], the terrestrial [suflīya], and the psychological [nafsīya]. A fourth group is the revelatory [tanzīlīya]. The Divine Essence becomes known through the Lucid Qur’ān, a Book in which the wet and the dry, the first and the last, the outer and the inner are brought together. It is beyond the power of any creature to produce the shortest chapter of this Holy Book. This challenge was issued to the great poetic geniuses who lived in the time of the Glorious Messenger, and it is handed down to all succeeding poets until the Resurrection, but future poets will no more be able than their predecessors to produce anything comparable. This Book provides subject matter for the sciences, and a model for the arts. It is a light revealing the Divine Omnipotence. It is healing for the heart, and nourishment for the spirit. For the believer it is a specific remedy. We must therefore read, ponder and understand the Qur’ān.

In this lower world it is impossible to see Allāh with our ordinary eyes. For it is not possible to perceive and comprehend the Essence of Allāh. On the contrary, we perceive our inability to fathom the Divine. The little fishes once gathered around abig fish, saying: “Show us this ocean which is supposed to exist.” “Very well,” he replied, “let us get out and take a look at it.”

* * *

Lā ilāha illā-llāh: There is no god but Allāh.

THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES AND QUALITIES

THE PERMANENT ATTRIBUTES OF ALLĀH, THE LORD OF MAJESTY

Life (hayat): being Alive, being Eternal, never ceasing to be.

Knowledge (‘ilm): Allāh has knowledge of all things; there is nothing unknown to Him.

Hearing (sam‘i): Allāh hears; there can be nothing that He does not hear, of which He is not Aware.

Sight (basar): Allāh sees; there is nothing unseen by Him.

Will (irāda): Allāh does whatever He wishes.

Power (qudra): There is nothing for which Allāh lacks capacity. He always prevails.

Speech (kalām): Allāh speaks, though not with a voice like ours, nor with the sound we make.

Creativity (takwīn): Allāh has created everything that exists, and He goes on creating. If He wishes, He destroys. Nothing can oppose His command.

THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF ALLĀH

Being (wujud): Allāh exists.

Existence FROM all eternity (qidam): He has no beginning. The First is He. Existence TO all eternity (baqa): He has no end. The Last is He.

Uniqueness (wahdaniyya): He is unique in Essence, Single in Quality. He has neither opposite nor parallel.

Transcendence (mukhalafatuni-l-hawādith): He resembles nothing, and nothing resembles Him.

Self-subsistence (qiyām bi-nafsihi): He has no need of space, but space needs Him.

TRUE FAITH, BELIEF IN THE UNSEEN, FEAR OF ALLĀH AND LOVE OF ALLĀH

Only Allāh, Exalted is He, possesses full knowledge of the Unseen. We have limited knowledge of it insofar as He allows. It behooves the believer to believe in the Unseen, to be obedient to Allāh's commands, to know that lawful things are lawful and forbidden things forbidden, to have the utmost respect for the Divine decrees. Only in this way does belief in the Unseen lead to the degree of Certainty, when many truths spontaneously emerge. Otherwise one is in a state of heedlessness, suiting the Divine commands to one's self. If you are intelligent, you will suit yourself to the Divine commands. Fear Allāh at all times. Love Him and seek His pleasure in all you undertake. Do lovingly whatever He commands. Fly fearfully away from all that He forbids.

However sinful you may be, never despair of Allāh's mercy. He is Independent of all the worlds. He is Pardoning, Tolerant, Forgiving.

Allāh Most High, make us all Your servants; make us a community faithful to the example set by your Beloved Muhammad, and turn our misery into bliss. For the sake of the Chief of the Messengers.

* * *

Lā ilāha illā-llāh: There is no god but Allāh.

* * *

THE SECOND DISCOURSE

The Beloved Messenger of Allāh

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

The Primordial Light and Final Mission.

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The Martyrdom of the Noble °Alī, the “Lion of Allāh.”

All praise and glory, all acts of worship and obedience are due to God alone —to Allāh Who is the Creator and Lord of all things. Everything shall return to Him. Blessings and peace be on the final Prophet, the last Messenger and Herald of the Truth. Peace be upon his family, offspring, wives, friends, helpers and companions, and upon all who love him now and until the Day of Resurrection. Amen.

* * *

The Exalted One tells His Beloved in the Holy Qur'ān:

Say: 'If you love Allāh, follow me; Allāh will love you and for give you your sins. Allāh is Forgiving, Compassionate.' [3:31].

THE PRIMORDIAL LIGHT AND FINAL MISSION

According to a noble Tradition, the blessed Prophet said: "The first thing Allāh created was my light."

Our blessed Master, Muhammad, is the Lord's Beloved. He is the intercessor on Judgment Day. He is the refuge of the poor. His light precedes all worlds; his mission succeeds them. He is the chief of all the Prophets and Messengers, guide of the pure and saintly, the Prophet of mankind and of all the powers unseen. The Exalted One created him of His own light and his light was made before all things, while his mission

follows that of all the other Prophets. He is the last and final Prophet, after whom no further Messenger will come. He is the seal of the Prophets. To him was revealed the Holy Qur'ān, the ultimate Book of scripture.

He is beautiful in name, in form, in lineage, in speech, in countenance; faithful to his promise, to his word ever true. The Exalted Throne exults in the dust from his feet. To earn the privilege of serving him, the angel Gabriel paid homage to the Truth for many a thousand years. Adam gained forgiveness and had his repentance accepted because he sought pardon for his sake. Because he bore his light, God's loyal friend Abraham could turn the fire of Nimrod's furnace into light.

His body is pure light. He casts no shadow. All the Prophets begged Allāh to let them be of his Community. Each one of them announced the good tidings of his coming. Upon his advent all the skies lit up; earth gloried in his being.

Muhammad is his noble name on earth; in heaven it is Ahmad, while on the Day of Resurrection he will be called by the noble name Mahmūd. Peace be upon him. In the Holy Qur'ān, the Exalted One addresses him not by any personal name, but as "My Messenger, My Servant, My Prophet"—or else gives him one of His own Names: Ra'ūf (Kind), Rahīm (Compassionate), °Aziz (Mighty), Nūr (Light), as well as:

We have not sent you except as a mercy to all worlds. [21:107].

In a Holy Tradition, Allāh tells him: "For your sake I have created all creation."

In another Qur’ānic Verse he is told:

We have not sent you but to all mankind, as a bringer of good tidings and as a warner; but most people do not know. [34:28].

He brings human beings the good news of Paradise and frightens stubborn and unbelieving tyrants with Hellfire.

He who swears allegiance to you, swears allegiance only to Allāh. [48:10].

If you love Allāh, follow me; Allāh will love you and forgive you your sins. Allāh is Forgiving, Compassionate. [3:31].

We have sent you to mankind as a Messenger, and Allāh is Witness enough. [4:79].

A light has come to you from Allāh. [5:15].

When Allāh created the Light-of-Muhammad, that newly created light said: LĀ ILĀHA ILLĀ-LLĀH (“There is no god but Allāh”), to which the Exalted One replied: MUHAMMADUN RASŪLU-LLĀH (“Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh”). These two utterances combined to form the

Affirmation of Divine Unity, the assertion that saves: LĀ ILĀHA ILLĀ-LLĀH—MUHAMMADUN RASŪLU-LLĀH.

The Exalted One then promised that He would not commit forever to the Fire any creature of His who pronounced these words and believed them in his heart.

The Verse: “When you threw, it was not you, but Allāh, who threw” [8:17], refers to an incident in the battle of Badr, when our Master threw a handful of dust that miraculously blinded the foe. The Lord declares that He Himself threw this dust by the hand of His Messenger.

In another Verse, He says:

Allāh and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who believe, bless him also, and salute him with peace. [33:56].

There are many Verses and Holy Traditions like these, indicating how we should praise and extol the Most Noble Messenger.

A great Companion once asked: “Messenger of Allāh, how long have you been a Prophet?” Our Master replied: “I was a Prophet when Adam was between water and earth.” On another occasion, our blessed Master asked the venerable °Umar: “How much do you love me, °Umar?” When the latter replied: “I love you more than anything, O Messenger of Allāh, yet I love myself even more than I love you,” he was told: “By God, °Umar, you cannot be a perfect believer.” Brought to tears by these words, °Umar

exclaimed: “O Messenger of Allāh, I now love you even more than myself!” The Messenger then said: “You have now become a perfect believer.”

A Bedouin once came and asked: “O Messenger of Allāh, when will the Resurrection be?” Our Master replied: “That is a matter predestined. It will be when it is to be. What preparation have you made against that day?”—“Messenger of Allāh,” said the Bedouin, “I have made no preparation, but I do love Allāh and yourself.”—“If you really mean what you say,” the blessed Prophet told him, “you will be with your Beloved.”

The venerable Anas ibn Mālik said: “Nothing ever gave us such delight as this conversation between the Bedouin and the blessed Prophet, for we loved our Master and his Four Caliphs more than anything else. We had been worried by the thought that these worthy beings, due to their good and meritorious deeds, must attain the high degrees in the Hereafter, whereas we should remain on the lower rungs, far removed from their beautiful presence. This conversation taught us that, although in deeds we did not share their rank, we could nevertheless hope to be resurrected with them through the love we bore them.”

Loving cannot be forced, for it is not subject to individual volition, but to the Universal Will. How may we achieve this love? If we obey Allāh’s commandments, if we follow the example set by His Messenger, we shall sow the seeds of affection in our hearts. These seeds will later bear fruit. They will grow in our hearts. Allāh will make our hearts incline toward Muhammad, on him be peace. Love and affection will emerge, so taking shape that we shall come to love him more than anything else, even ourselves, and we shall arrive at perfect faith. O Lord, beautify our hearts with the love of Muhammad! Keep us close to him in this world and in the Hereafter! Amen.

°Umar ibn al-Khattāb reported the following Tradition, according to which the blessed Prophet said: “There are certain among the servants of Allāh, Exalted is He, who are neither prophets nor martyrs, and yet the Prophets and Martyrs wish to be near them on the Day of Resurrection.” On hearing this, the Companions asked: “O Messenger of Allāh, by what action did they achieve such rank? Let us do the same, that we may attain it also!” The blessed Prophet then replied: “Such are they who love one another not because of kinship, but for the sake of Allāh, without ulterior motive. Their faces are most radiant for Allāh’s sake, and they reside on pulpits of light. At the Resurrection, they will not fall into fear and consternation like the rest. Though others grieve, they are not sad.” Having said this, he recited the Verse:

See now! Surely on the friends of Allāh there is no fear, nor shall they grieve. [10:62].

THE NAMES OF THE BLESSED PROPHET

The names of the blessed Messenger are two thousand and twenty in number. Two hundred and one of them are well known. His name and his noble attributes are mentioned in all the heavenly scriptures. The blessed Jesus speaks of him in the Gospel:

And then Jesus, the son of Mary, said: ‘Children of Israel, I am Allāh’s Messenger to you, confirming what came before me in the Torah and bringing good tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name will be Ahmad (Most Praiseworthy).’ Yet when he brought them clear signs, they said: ‘This is sheer magic [61:6].’

When the blessed Muhammad came in due course, they dismissed his obvious miracles as sorcery. They did not believe in him, even though their own Messengers had announced and foretold his coming.

His noble name is to be found in the Psalms, as well as in the Torah and other scriptures.

When for some reason known only to Allāh, Adam ate from the forbidden tree, he was exiled from Paradise and spent three hundred years repenting and imploring forgiveness, weeping and wailing all the while.

The two of them said: Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. Unless You forgive us and have mercy on us, surely we shall be among the lost.' [7:23].

One day, as he tearfully pleaded, "My Lord, pardon us for the sake of the Light-of-Muhammad that I bear," the divine Compassion overflowed and he heard the words: "Adam, I have pardoned you and your wife for Muhammad's sake. How did you learn of Muhammad's standing in my sight?" Adam replied: "My Lord, as soon as I opened my eyes, when You had created me and given me life, I beheld the name of Muhammad along with Your noble Name in every part of Paradise. I knew that the universe had been created because of him, and that sinners would be forgiven for his sake." The Lord then said: "Though a person's sin be as deep as the ocean, as vast as the sun, I will pardon if My pardon is asked for Muhammad's sake. I did exile you from Paradise, O Adam, but when I have installed his Community there I shall never exile them again. If someone worships Me, yet has no love in him for My beloved Muhammad, I do not accept his worship though it mount from earth to sky."

One sin should leave us sighing for a thousand days.

Lord, I've sinned a thousand times, and not one day have I sighed!

The name Muhammad means "most highly extolled and praised." Because the Exalted One has linked that name together with His own, it sounds on the tongues of angels as on the tongues of all the Prophets, Messengers and Saints from Adam to the Glory of the Universe. On all of them be peace!

Here follow some of the noble names of the Prophet Muhammad*:

Muhammad (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Praised One

Ahmad (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Most Praised

Mahmud (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Praiseworthy

Hamid (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Praising (He Who Praises)

Ahyad (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Name in the Torah

Wahid (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Unique

Mahin (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) He Who Effaces

Hashirin (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) He Who Gathers

Akibun (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Successor

Tāhā (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Title of Sura 20

Yāsin (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Title of Sura 36

Tahir (may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him) Pure One

HIS PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION AND MORAL ATTRIBUTES

The Lion of Allāh, the venerable °Ālī ibn Abī Tālib, and fifteen of the Companions have handed down this description of the Chosen Messenger, Muhammad Mustafā (Allāh bless him and give him peace): In character and conduct he was the most perfect of human beings. All the great Prophets were physically complete and beautiful of face, but the beloved of Allāh was the most beautiful of them all. His chaste body was beautiful, his limbs

well proportioned, his figure most comely, his forehead was wide and his chest broad, as were his palms and the space between his shoulders. His neck, which was long and graceful, was like pure silver. His shoulders and arms, as well as the calves of his legs, were sturdy and solid, while he was long in the wrists. His fingers were fairly long, and fingers and hands alike were rather thick. His blessed stomach was not fat, and did not protrude below his chest. His insteps were arched, not flat. Medium tall in height, he was well built, powerful and strong. He was neither too thin nor overweight, but a good medium. As for his blessed skin, this was softer than silk. The large head, arched brows and straight nose were in perfect balance. His face was more oval than circular, neither too fat nor too round in the cheeks.

His eyebrows were close, but did not meet in the middle. He was not beetle-browed. There was a vein between his two eyebrows that used to swell and show up when he was angry. His eyelashes were long and the eyes themselves were black and beautiful and quite large. There was a touch of red in the whites of his eyes. His coloring was light, neither as white as chalk nor dark enough to be swarthy. The radiance that glowed in this blessed face was of a gentle rosy whiteness, bright and gleaming. His teeth were as lustrous as pearls; his front teeth sparkled as he talked, and when he smiled his blessed mouth beamed flashes as of exquisite lightning. When he let his hair grow, it came down past the lobes of his ears. His beard was thick and full. It was not long, but more than just enough for him to grasp. When he departed for the world of Eternity, his hair and beard had only just begun to turn grey: he had about twenty grey hairs on his head, a few in his beard. His body was clean and sweet smelling. Whether he perfumed himself or not, his skin smelled better than the finest perfumes. Anyone who shook hands with him could smell his pleasant fragrance all day long. If he stroked a child’s head with his blessed hand, that child could be distinguished from other children by his delightful fragrance.

At the moment of his birth he was clean and neat and naturally circumcised. He was born with his umbilical cord already cut. His senses were unusually acute. He could hear from a great distance, and could see further than anyone else. All his movements were gentle. When he set out to go somewhere, he would make his way calmly and unhurriedly, deviating neither to right nor to left, but he walked briskly and smoothly. He might appear to be strolling along, yet those who approached him would find themselves falling behind, even though they were walking fast. There was light and sweetness in his blessed face, fluency and charm in his speech. His language was articulate and eloquent, and he expressed himself with extraordinary lucidity. He never spoke unnecessarily and there was wisdom and good counsel in all that he did say. He always addressed people at the level of their understanding. His face was smiling, his words were sweet. He never said a bad word to anyone, nor treated anybody badly. He would never cut a person short. He was affable and humble. Bad-tempered and coarse he was not. But he was serious and dignified. His laugh was also a smile. A person who suddenly happened to see him would be struck with awe.

Whoever enjoyed his company and friendship would come to love him with all his heart and soul. He respected the virtuous according to their degrees. He also treated his relatives with very great honor, yet never preferred them over those more worthy than they. Just as he treated with kindness the members of his own household and his companions, so did he deal gently and graciously with other people, too. He was very good to his servants. He fed them whatever he ate himself, gave them the same clothes to wear. He was generous, gracious, tender and compassionate, courageous and tolerant. He was firm in pledge and promise, true to his word, he was superior to all in goodness of character and excellence of mind, worthy of every kind of praise and commendation. He gave all praise to God. In short, he was beautiful in form, perfected in character, a happy and blessed being whose like has never been and never will be created, may Allāh bless him and give him peace.

The Prophet Consoles His Servant Thawbān

The noble Messenger had a servant called Thawbān, who loved him dearly. Thawbān would turn pale with anxiety when he thought: “If ever I were not to see the blessed Messenger I could not bear the separation. He is chief of the Prophets on the Day of Resurrection. His station in Paradise is certainly far above mine. If we are to be separated there, how will it be with me then?” Seeing Thawbān in this condition, the blessed Messenger said to him: “You are all pale and wan, Thawbān? Can you be ill?” Thawbān wept as he told the Messenger what was troubling him. Our Master thereupon recited the Noble Verse:

Whoever obeys Allāh and the Messenger, they are with those whom Allāh has blessed, the Prophets, the truthful, the mar tyrs and the righteous; the best of company are they! Such is the bounty of Allāh; Allāh suffices as One Who Knows. [4:69-70].

* * *

The Messenger was saying, in effect: “If you love someone, you are with that person.”

HIS EXEMPLARY BEHAVIOR

Our noble Master bore with patience all the pain and hurt inflicted on him, never speaking an unpleasant word to those who caused such pain and hurt. Patient and forbearing, he was ever ready to pardon. When the unbelievers knocked out his tooth at the battle of Uhud, some of his Companions urged him to curse them, but our Master said: “I was sent as a mercy to all worlds. I was not sent to curse.” Then he added: “Among these poor wretches who are fighting me today, I see many who will come to believe in me. Their offspring will spread God’s religion to east and west. They will be warriors in the cause of Allāh.” That is indeed what came to pass.

Our Master even pardoned a woman who sought to poison him. He was very generous and never turned beggars away empty-handed. If necessary, he would borrow in order to provide. He was courageous, riding into battle upon a mule. When his Companions retreated at the battle of Hunayn, he charged the enemy all by himself. As the Exalted One says in His Holy Qur’ān:

Those who delivered the messages of Allāh and feared Him, and feared none but Allāh; Allāh is Sufficient as a Reckoner. [33:39].

Like our blessed Messenger Muhammad, none of the Prophets ever feared anything but God. The Beloved was clearly not afraid of any other creature. He suited his behavior to great and to small. He was kind to little children, and showed more affection to the poor than to the rich. He was tender and compassionate to the weak and to strangers. His kindness and compassion extended to all God’s creatures. He was humble. His seat was a mat of straw, his mount a donkey. He used to bring food home himself. He would sometimes perform his prayers on the bare earth. Our Master used to visit poor people and non-Muslims when they were sick, asking about their condition and how they were feeling. If slaves and poor folk invited him, he would call at their homes. He used to say: “Be compassionate toward every

creature, so that Allāh may have mercy on you too.” He used to serve in the house, helping the members of his family. He would knead the dough. He sometimes swept the house. He sewed his own garments, milked the goats, mended his torn clothes. He attended to his own affairs. He used to eat together with his servant, whom he helped with some of his tasks. There was none so just, so trustworthy and truthful, as our Master the Most Noble Messenger.

Before the command had come to reveal his Prophetic Mission, the polytheists used to call him Muhammed the Trustworthy. In short, in moral character he was at the pinnacle of creation. May Allāh grant that we all obtain his intercession! We should love him more than ourselves. Let us spare no effort in modeling our character on that of the noble Messenger of Allāh. Love and affection demand total sacrifice for the loved one’s sake.

LOVE AND SACRIFICE FOR HIS SAKE

The Ordeal of Khabbāb

Our Master the Prophet wrote letters to the emperors, kings and tribal chieftains of the day, inviting them to the religion of Islam. Those to whom he dispatched such messages included the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, the Shah of Iran, King Muqawqis of Egypt, and the ruler of Yemen, as well as tribes great and small. Some of the recipients accepted the letter and invitation and sent a reply. Some put the Messenger’s ambassadors to death. Others considered it beneath their dignity to reply and put the letter aside without paying any attention to it. Still others conceived an enmity towards our Master.

Those who reacted favorably sent envoys in response to the invitation, learned about Islam and eventually accepted it.

The Emperors Heraclius of Byzantium and Muqawqis of Egypt acknowledged receipt of their letters and sent gifts to our Master along with their replies. The Shah of Iran put our master's ambassador to death and tore up the Prophetic letter, thereby incurring the wrath of God. Just as he had had the envoy put to death, he was to be killed by his own sons and his kingdom was shortly to be torn to shreds like the letter.

Meanwhile a letter had been written to a chieftain called Habib, head of one of the Arab tribes, inviting him to Islam. This cruel tyrant read the letter and subjected the Prophet's envoy to a great deal of ill treatment before sending him back. "Take this letter out of my sight!" he cried in a furious rage, so they put it with other papers in a chest in the treasury of the palace. There it was destined to remain intact. Now that chief had a very handsome grown-up son whose name was Khabbāb. It happened one day that this young man entered his father's treasury to get some documents. While Khabbāb was looking for these papers in the chest we spoke of, our Master's letter came into his hand. The noble letter attracted his attention so he opened and read it; as he read, the fire of faith took hold of his entire being. The light of Islam rose in his heart and enveloped his whole body. For in that blessed letter was written the blessed and saving sentence, the name of God which is the key to Paradise:

Lā ilāha illā-llāh—Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh

"There is no god but God—Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

The contents of the letter drew the immediate attention of anyone calling himself a human being, showing him Truth. It said that there is no god but God and that He alone deserves worship and recognition. “O Ruler! Do not have people worship you as God; let us not worship one another as gods.” The letter went on to demonstrate to the faithful the ways of salvation in this world and the Hereafter. It reminded those without faith of the retribution awaiting them in this world and the next. It condemned tyranny, urged government with justice, proclaimed that all men are the slaves of God and that no nation is superior to another, and declared that it is those who fear God that are noble in His sight. The letter was signed “God’s slave and Messenger Muhammad.”

Khabbāb read the letter over and over again. The affection he began to feel towards its author was of inexpressible intensity. From that day on, Khabbāb became very pensive. He neither ate, drank, nor slept. Who was the Muhammad who had written this letter? Why had he written to invite them to the religion of Islam? Though he wrote of himself as Allāh’s slave and Messenger, he did not seek any recompense from them in exchange for this invitation. He was inviting them to salvation, prosperity and happiness, showing them how to escape disgrace in this world and shame in the Hereafter. He was summoning them to draw near the Truth and encounter the Divine Beauty.

Khabbāb was going to discuss the letter with his father, but his father cut him short saying: “Yes, such a letter did come. The writer declared our religion and our idols false. He is a sorcerer who wants to sow discord among the Arabs by establishing a new religion, claiming that his religion of Islam is the only true religion, making no distinction between rich and poor and regarding the slave and the free man as equal. Beware my son, do not be taken in by him! Cheer up and enjoy yourself.”

To the young man however, filled as he was with the light of LĀ ILĀHA ILLĀ-LLĀH and the love of MUHAMMAD RASŪLU-LLĀH, his father's words came as a surprise. "Shame on you father," he said to himself. "How can you slander so brazenly this Herald of the Truth who invites you to salvation." Having read the name of God's Messenger Muhammad, the young man began to love his blessed person; night and day he silently prayed to Allāh: "O My Lord God, you know my heart. I have come to love the Messenger without having seen his face. I am ready to give my life without hesitation when the moment comes. Show me his beauty just once. Then, let me die. I have no further need of throne or power." With only his love and affection for company, he went off into isolated places. Weeping, he never ceased mentioning the name of the Chosen Messenger; night and day he entreated his Lord …

The love felt by Khabbāb increased from day to day. He grew impatient to see the Messenger, to meet him, to attain the beauty of his presence. It was not easy however. The Beloved does not come straight to hand. Perseverance is needed, patience is needed. There is no rose without thorns. He who would pick the rose must expect his finger to feel the prick of the thorn. A sensation arising within him, a yearning, this love had begun to spill from his lips in words.

To you my life I sacrifice, Muhammad

In both worlds you're my remedy, Muhammad

Before I saw you, love filled me with yearning

I felt it even then, my Lord Muhammad

Your vision’s in my heart engraved forever

Naught but your beauty I behold, Muhammad

Body and soul this fire of love’s consuming

Prescribe the cure O Doctor Wise, Muhammad

If for your sake I’m shattered all in pieces

Let my life be your ransom, O Muhammad

I am thirsty for love’s union, how I sigh

If only you will hear my cries, Muhammad

Be what may, should I into your presence come

There at your feet I’ll ever stay, Muhammad

These words were partly spoken, partly sobbed. He gave up sleeping at night and abandoned all pleasurable pursuits and companionship. Avoiding other people, he frequented out of the way places. When his mother became aware of this state of affairs, she raised the subject with his father who assembled his council and summoned Khabbāb to it. When Khabbāb arrived his father embraced him and kissed his eyes. “What has become of you, my son?” he asked. “What is this state you’re in? Tell your father. I am the Emperor, let me see what I can do. Let me remedy what is troubling you.” To this, the venerable Khabbāb replied: “My dear father, since the day I first read that letter I have loved the Noble Muhammad. I have abandoned your false religion. I have rejected your idols. I have now found Allāh and come to know Him. I am the lover of His Messenger. Maybe you will be angry with me and throw me in prison, perhaps you will have me tortured and put to death. This I know, I will not change my course to save my life. If I cannot see him I shall really die. Hear and understand. I have become a Muslim. I have come to believe in the final Prophet.” He then pronounced the testimony of belief, raising his index finger and saying:

ashhadu an lā ilāha illā-llāh wa-ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasūlu-llāh

“I testify that there is no god but God and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”

Hearing these words from his son, the father leapt up in a rage, seized Khabbāb and struck him to the ground. Trampling him underfoot as if to kick him to death, he swore by his idols that unless he renounced his words he would kill him. All the ministers appealed to their chief and took Khabbāb away from him, saving him from certain death. They then turned to their chief and said: “O Prince, do not be so hard on a young man. We

shall counsel him and bring him back to our religion." From that day on they surrounded Khabbāb with voluptuous gazelle-eyed girls and urged him to enjoy the pleasures of life: "Why enter a religion you know nothing of? Why abandon our religion? Come to your senses and think. You are giving up the blessings of here and now and putting your faith in future blessings. It is not just that you are going to lose your throne and your crown. Your father will kill you by his own hand. You will lose so much power. Look at these beautiful slave girls, all for you; the throne, the crown are for you." Such was their counsel and advice, but all Khabbāb would say was: "I prefer to be a slave in the religion of Muhammad than to be a king or prince in unbelief." He would neither look at the beautiful girls nor give ear to their advice.

He kept crying: "Ah, Muhammad is God's Messenger. Ah, God is One. His Messenger is Ahmad." Several days passed in this fashion, then one day Khabbāb's father came up to him. Seeing that all advice had failed, he again trampled Khabbāb underfoot intending to kill him. He struck him incessantly, kicking him with his accursed feet. The blood streamed from Khabbāb's mouth and nose, but the only sounds to pass his lips were these blessed words:

Lā ilāha illā-llāh—Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh

The Prince drew his dagger, but the ministers again intervened just as he was about to strike the fatal blow, saying: "O Prince, leave the matter to us. Since advice has failed to reform him, we shall lock him up for a while, frighten him, put him to the torture. Then perhaps he will come back to our religion. Do not kill him yet." Though Khabbāb's cries would have moved mountains, no trace of pity showed in the stony heart of his cruel father. "O Prince," they said, "if he is not amenable to the torture and imprisonment we shall inflict upon him, then you may have him put to death." The torture

then began. First they had Khabbāb flogged by the public scourgers and made him go hungry. Then they made his bread too salty and refused him water.

In spite of these tortures Khabbāb did not renounce the religion of Islam. On the contrary, his love increased and he gratefully accepted the tortures as a blessing. He consoled himself by saying: “If I have not seen him, at least I am dying for him.”

One day the Prince came again with a view to advising his son. He said: “Look my son, you have disgraced yourself as well as bringing misfortune down on us. We feel sorry for you. This is my final word of advice before I hand you over to the executioner. Come back to your religion. You be chief in my stead.” But the venerable Khabbāb replied:

“Father, what are you saying? Am I to exchange the Hereafter for this world? I shall not change gold for tin. I am the slave of Allāh, He Who is Lord of All Worlds. I am the lover of His Beloved. My heart is full of love for him. No matter how you punish me, even if you inflict a punishment a thousand times worse than this, even if you dismember my body, I shall never renounce the religion of Islam.” Then he went on: “Whatever punishment you have in store, impose it. Here is my head, my back, my body. I am here in front of you. Go ahead, your punishment has no effect upon me. Love has enveloped my whole being. I have committed myself body and soul to its path. The fire of love has become my companion. Those who follow the Lord Muhammad give their all for his sake. O father! Break your pride. Do not feel ashamed before your people. If you have any intelligence, come to Islam. You are calling me to unbelief with the whip, while I am calling you to the Truth with my own sweet words.”

His father saw that it was a hopeless case and that his son would never come around, so he summoned the executioners and told them: “Torture him for three days then kill him on the fourth.” They took that venerable young man, put a man with a whip in charge of him and made him draw water under the sun. They forced him to work, lashing him without regard for his tiredness and saying: “Reject Muhammad. Worship our idols.” The blood that ran from his mouth, his nose and his head dried upon him, but no sound passed his lips except the words—Lā ilāha illā-llāh. Although he was drawing water, they considered a mouthful of it too much for him. At length there was no strength left in his legs, no luster in his eyes. Three days and three nights went by like this. As the hour of execution approached, the guard on duty was overcome by such drowsiness that, although he washed his face and pinched himself, he found it quite impossible to stave off sleep. They had actually bound Khabbāb with thick chains and he was shackled hand and foot. His legs had grown feeble and his eyes dull. On top of it all, for three days they had even refused him salted bread. The guard dropped off to sleep and what a sleep it was … “Dear me,” he had said, “Let me not fall asleep.” But God had ordered him to sleep. He was not even aware of this. As Khabbāb continued slowly winding the pulley of the well, he made this plea to God: “O Lord, You are All-Capable and Self-Subsisting. You see this condition I am in. You are the One Who remedies distress. My agony is known to You. Open to me the ways that lead to Your Beloved Muhammad. Show me the blessed beauty of his face. I glory in this pain and torture I have suffered for the sake of my religion. If I die without seeing him with my worldly eyes, it will be a torment for me to await the Resurrection. A moment’s separation from him seems like centuries to me. Allāh, Solver of Difficulties, I beg you, let me meet him.” So saying, he sighed from the depths of his being.

As the venerable Khabbāb was making this supplication, Allāh who grants what He wishes to whom He wishes, said to Gabriel: “Khabbāb has completed the lover’s ordeal. Go and undo his bonds. I shall cause the story of his affection for My Beloved and the sufferings he bore for My sake and his to be handed down as an example to all My servants who lay claim to

Love. The time for encounter has come. Let the lover meet his beloved." At that instant Khabbāb's fetters suddenly dissolved. His chains fell away like dust and the shackles on his hands and feet came off by themselves. "Allāh!" he cried and fled from that place. He did not know which road to take. But he flew like a bird crying. "My Master, My Beloved Prophet!" His tongue affirmed the Unity of God. He covered a journey of eighty days in one night, not touching the ground but riding Love's Miraculous Steed until he entered Medina the Illumined.

He raced towards that unfading light. When he reached Medina the Illumined, °Amr, may God be pleased with him, one of the Companions of the Messenger, came out to meet him. Seeing a young man weeping in front of him, he embraced him and asked him the reason for his tears. He told him to explain what troubled him, saying: "Young man, are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Let me give you bread and water. My son, I see in you the marks of faith." Khabbāb replied: "I do not want to eat or drink. I have long since forgotten them, having made love my sustenance." °Amr realized that this boy was a lover. "To whom is your love directed? Tell me, my son," he said. Not knowing where he was, Khabbāb kept his secret to himself for fear of bringing some misfortune on himself. °Amr understood this and said: "I am a Muslim, to God be the praise. If you confide in me for Muhammad's sake, I shall not divulge your secret to a soul." In the presence of such divine grace Khabbāb at once went into ecstasy.

Meanwhile, Gabriel descended to our Master the Lord's Beloved and said: "O Messenger of Allāh, I bring you greetings from the Truth. You are to go out with your Companions and welcome a lover who has come to meet you. Through love for you his exterior has become a ruin and his interior a palace. He has suffered much agony for the sake of the religion of Islam. Allāh says: 'I have bestowed upon Khabbāb the reward for the patience of Job, on him be peace. Let My Beloved greet him and take him to his bosom. I love him for loving My Beloved." When our Master received this good news, he went with his Companions to meet Khabbāb. Lover and

loved one were united. Our Master embraced Khabbāb and hugged him to his breast saying: “Welcome faithful lover, my son.” When Khabbāb wanted to rub his face in the dust at the feet of the Messenger, he said to him kindly: “O my son, what difficulties you have endured in religion.” When Khabbāb related his experiences to them, our Master and his Companions shed tears of blood.

Yes, this is how lovers achieve felicity. Khabbāb proved his love, met the Messenger of Allāh in this world and will be with him in the Hereafter. We are together with those we love.

HIS FAREWELL SERMON

What now follows is the Farewell Sermon of our blessed and honored Prophet, recorded by the venerable Imām al-Bukhārī:

bismi-llāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm

—In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate.—

To Allāh we give praise. To Him we repent. We seek refuge with Him from the wickedness within us and from our evil deeds.

O people! Listen well to what I say. I do not know whether I shall ever meet you here again after this year.

O people! As this day, this month and this city[1] of yours are holy, so are your lives, your property and your honor sacrosanct and inviolable.

My companions! You will shortly meet your Lord and He will surely ask you about your present state and conduct. Beware that you do not return to the error of your former ways and your blood feuds.

Let those who are here convey this testament of mine to those who are absent. It may be that someone who hears it from you will understand and keep it better than those listening here and now.

My companions! Let anyone holding a pledge in trust return it to its owner. Interest of every kind is abolished, beneath my foot. But you must repay the capital lent to you.

Wrong not and you shall not be wronged. Lending at interest is now forbidden by God's decree. This ugly habit, a relic of the time of Ignorance, I trample in all its forms. The first interest I abolish is that of ºAbbās ibn °Abd al-Muttalib.[2]

My companions! All claims on blood from the time of Ignorance are completely abolished. The first blood claim I abolish is that of Rabī°a,[3] the granddaughter of °Abd al-Muttalib.

O people! Satan now despairs of ever re-establishing his control and dominion in this land of yours. But he will still be pleased to have you obey him in other matters that you consider unimportant. Beware of these also to protect your religion.

O people! I enjoin you to observe the rights of women and to fear God in this respect. You have taken wives as a trust from God, and it is in the name of God that you have made their honor and virtue lawful to you. You have rights over your wives and they have rights over you. You have the right that your wives should not allow anyone you do not like to violate the sanctity of the home. If they do admit someone unwelcome to you, you may beat them gently and admonish them. Your wives have the right to be supplied by you with all the food and clothing appropriate to the traditions of the country.

O believers! I leave you a trust which if you hold fast to it you will never go astray. That trust is God's Book, the Qur'ān.

O believers! Listen well and remember my words. The Muslim is brother to the Muslim, therefore all Muslims are brothers. It is unlawful to violate any right belonging to a brother in religion. But if he gives willingly, well and good.

My companions! Do not wrong yourselves. You have rights over yourselves also.

O people! The Lord God has assigned to everyone his due (in the Qur'ān). It is not necessary to make a bequest in favor of an heir.[4] The child belongs

to the one in whose bed it is born. For the adulterer there is deprivation. He who claims as his father one who is not his father, or an ingrate a master who is not his master, on him be the wrath of God, the curse of the angels and the imprecations of all the Muslims. Of such people the Lord God will accept neither their repentance nor their equity nor their testimony.

O people! When they come to ask you about me, what will you say?

'We shall testify that you delivered God's message, discharged the mission entrusted to you, and gave us good advice and counsel … '

O Lord be my witness. O Lord be my witness. O Lord be my witness …

Our Master the Most Noble Prophet is a burnished mirror. Whoever looks at him sees himself.

One day, Abū Jahl came into the presence of our Master and addressed him in these words: "Muhammad, I have never seen anyone as ugly-looking and as harsh-spoken as you." Our Master's response to this insult was to say: "You are quite right." After a while, Abū Bakr the Most Veracious joined that same company. He said to our Master: "My mother, my father and myself be your ransom, Messenger of Allāh, never have I seen anyone more beautiful of face and sweeter in speech than you." To these sincere words of Abū Bakr he replied: "You are quite right, my dear friend of the Cave."[5]

Wondering what to make of these two contradictory remarks, the Companions exclaimed: "Messenger of Allāh, Abū Jahl disparaged you

with a description that does not fit you at all. Then Abū Bakr spoke admiringly of some of your virtues. Yet you gave the selfsame answer to both of them!" "Yes," said he, "I am a clear mirror. Abū Jahl looked at me and saw himself."

You see, believers, the love of the venerable Khabbāb had also been reflected in the Mirror-of-Muhammad. Should a sincere believer come and ask: "I love God's Messenger, but does my Master love me, I wonder?" our reply would be: "In whatever measure your love for the Holy Prophet may be, in like measure is the Messenger's affection towards you." Therefore let your love and affection for him grow. Draw your own conclusions from this and reflect upon this Verse:

Allāh and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who believe, bless him also, and greet him with peace. [33:56]

In terms of love and affection, the relationship between the Lord God and our Master is that between Creator and pure creature. Observe the manifestations, whereby the infinite love that is in Allāh, the First of the first and Last of the last, becomes apparent in His Beloved and brings about endless love in that noble being. Love becomes the guiding principle for the essence of the Message-bearer, and this love between the two Beloveds increases every instant from all eternity to all eternity. But only love's own people understand what I am saying.

Let us for our part love Allāh and His Messenger and those God loves, that we may earn respect. That we may be with those we love in this world and the Hereafter. Those who love Allāh and His Messenger and the righteous ones, theirs is the straight road—the road of Islam—and the path of right

guidance, that is the path they tread. They have nothing in common with Satan, cruel tyrants, unbelievers, the impious and the immoral.

They worship Allāh, they model their characters on the ethics of Muhammad. Wickedness, lying, counterfeiting, laziness, malice, all these they renounce. They pardon any evil done to them and treat the perpetrator of it kindly. They are toler ant; they practice generosity, contentment, patience, gratitude, for so did their beloved Prophet.

The Martyrdom of the Noble °Alī, The "Lion of Allāh"

One morning a coward by the name of Ibn Muljam came upon the Prophet's son-in-law, the habitation of the Lord, while he was in the presence of the Truth, and smote him with a poisoned sabre. That habitation of the Lord and refuge of the poor, the son-in-law of the Chosen Messenger and Vicegerent of the Truth, lay sprawled in his own blood. They took the blessed Imām from his prayer niche and bore him to his felicitous abode, where they laid him upon his bed. How many battles he had fought, how many savage unbelievers he had dispatched to Hell with a single blow, of how many villains' villainy he had rid the world. But, such is destiny, he had fallen victim to a coward's plot.

The blessed Imām looked tenderly at his revered sons, as if he was reading on the Tablet Preserved in Heaven the tragedies that would befall them. "Who struck me?" he asked Imām Hasan. They at once brought the cruel assassin into the Caliph's presence. The Imām recognized his assailant, for Ibn Muljam had once worked for him as a servant. It was during that time that the Imām had said to Ibn Muljam, miraculously predicting his own death: "Ibn Muljam, my end is in your hand." On that occasion Ibn Muljam had said: "Far be it from me, O Imām. Let my hand wither if I should do

such a thing.” He had then begged to be put to death, but the Lion of God had objected: “How should I have you put to death, when you have committed no crime? I should be a wrongful tyrant if I imprisoned you or had you killed when you have not been guilty of any offense.”

The time and the hour had come, and fate had shown its hand. Imām °Alī asked Ibn Muljam: “What have I done to you, Ibn Muljam; have I touched your honor, property or person?” Overcome with fear and dread, Ibn Muljam managed to say: “By no means; only the judgment belongs to God alone, O Imām.”

The blessed Caliph said: “Your words are true, but your intention is false.”

They took Ibn Muljam away and put him in jail under surveillance. Turning to Imām Hasan, the Caliph said later: “If I recover from this wound it will be my business to deal with him. If I die, kill him with a single stroke of the sword, so that the divine law is carried out. Take care not to kill him with cruelty or torture, for I once heard your grandfather Muhammad, God bless him and give him peace, say: ‘Do not kill even a rabid dog with torture and pain.” Then they brought him milk. Indicating half of it, he said: “Send this milk to the stranger in the jail. His stomach is empty.” “Who is this stranger in the jail, O Imām?” they asked. “My murderer, Ibn Muljam,” he said, “his stomach is hungry.”

They had the milk taken to Ibn Muljam. But he would not drink it and handed it back, saying: “You have put poison in it. You are going to kill me. I won’t drink, I won’t drink!”

When they told the Imām that Ibn Muljam had not drunk the milk and what he had said, this was his response: “Why did Ibn Muljam hold a bad suspicion of us? If he had drunk the milk, when the Day of Resurrection came and my foot was on the threshold of Paradise, I would not have entered without taking Ibn Muljam into Paradise too.”

This °Alī, may God be pleased with him, lover of the Messenger, was the product of the lessons he learned in the school of love, from love’s teacher the Mentor of the Universe. He is the gate of the City of Knowledge, Tolerance and Love, just as °Umar is the gate of the City of Justice, Abū Bakr of the City of Veracity and °Uthmān of the City of Modesty. May God be pleased with them all.

O Lord, do not part us from Your Beloved! Through Your forgiveness and mercy, assemble us beneath his banner on the dreadful Day of Resurrection, together with all the believers. Amen, for the sake of the Chief of the Messengers.

All praise be to Allāh, Lord of All the Worlds.

NOTES

[1]Mecca

[2]Uncle of the Prophet of Prophets, on him be peace.

[3]A cousin of the Prophet of Prophets, on him be peace.

[4]i.e., one who will automatically receive a share in the inheritance according to the Qur’ānic rules.

[5]Referring to the cave in which the Prophet, on him be peace, and Abū Bakr, may God be pleased with him, had once hidden together from their pursuing enemies.

THE THIRD DISCOURSE

The Perfection of Faith

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

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Ibrāhīm Ad’ham and the People of Basra.

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Only they are believers whose hearts tremble when Allāh is mentioned, and when His signs are recited to them it increases them in faith, and in their Lord they set their trust; those who keep up prayer, and spend from what We have provided for them; those in truth are the believers. They have degrees with their Lord, and forgiveness, and bountiful provision. [8:2-4].

* * *

QUALITIES OF THE TRUE BELIEVER

These noble Verses are like a touchstone. By applying it to our words and deeds, to what we believe in and where we place our trust, we can test the value and degree of our faith, our Islam, our very humanity. Just as we might test a piece of yellow metal to see if it was genuine gold, we hold the means to assess and verify the worth of our conduct and behavior. These Verses describe the attitudes proper to the true believer. The attainment of divine approval is assured for those who acquire the characteristics here ordained.

If we may interpret His words, the Exalted One is telling us: “Genuine believers are those of My servants whose hearts are burnished when they hear My Name: with fear of Me and love of Me, with My Beauty and My Glory. When My Qur’ān is recited to them, they hear My Verses with their inward ear; but they also strive to act on what they hear. The light of their faith shines brighter in proportion to their efforts, and by that light they can discriminate truly between good and evil, clarity and darkness, faith and error. They come to rely on Me completely in all they undertake,

everywhere and in everything; in all their enterprises they entrust their affairs to Me, believing Me to be the Creator of all things.

“Those noble believers are My servants who perform their five daily prayers as they were performed by My Messenger, duly distinguishing the degrees of priority, viz. what is strictly obligatory (fard); what is necessary (wājib); what is customary (sunna); and what is recommended (mustahabb). For My sake and in My cause they use the provision We have bestowed upon them to feed and entertain My servants, indeed all My creatures. Such character and conduct are the marks of those who truly believe in Me, know Me, and have their being in Me. In My Presence—My Paradise—I have prepared for them high stations and end less blessings: blessings no eye ever saw, no words could describe, no ear ever heard of, and which exceed the measure of the human heart. What these blessings are, only I—Allāh—know.

“If, inspite of these qualities, they sometimes sin through human weakness, there is still My pardon and forgiveness. There is generous provision for them in this world and in the Hereafter, for My blessings are infinite and everlasting.” Let us ask ourselves a few questions: When do our hearts beat faster, at the mention of Allāh—or when we hear our own names mentioned? Do our eyes weep in awe of His power? Do we feel moved by His love? Do we take pleasure from hearing the Holy Qur’ān recited? Can we duly fulfill, with equal pleasure, the commandments of the Truth? Can we do the things He has ordained, and avoid those He has forbidden? Are we punctual in our observance? Do we rely on the Truth in all our undertakings?

To the degree in which we can give affirmative answers to these questions, to that extent we can be considered believers in the Truth, i.e., believers as Allāh would have us be.

If we are honest in our self-assessment, we shall recognize that we are as much in need of guidance as the blind. We shall pay grateful heed to the voices of the Qur'ān, our blessed Prophet, and our great teachers and guides.

The Fate of a Blind Horseman Who Rejected Good Advice

Two horsemen rode forth in the early morning hours. One of these riders was blind. Having dropped his whip, he dismounted and began groping around for it. There was a chill in the air, and a snake had coiled up and gone to sleep at that spot. The creature was rigid from the cold, so that it felt like a whip when the blind man touched it with his hand. He picked it up, remounted, and caught up with his comrade, who asked where he had been. The blind rider explained that he had dropped his old whip, but had found a better one lying on the ground. His friend warned him that his new "whip" was really a snake, but the blind man stubbornly refused to throw it away. Eventually the sun came up. The sun's warmth roused the creature, which inflicted a fatal bite on the blind horseman …

Do we not cling to attitudes and habits that are as dangerous to us as the rider's "whip"? Have we not exchanged knowledge for ignorance, faith for unbelief, light for darkness, work for sloth? Do we not hope to gain Paradise without worship, deceiving ourselves by saying: "My heart is pure"? Allāh has no need of prayer, it is we who need it. Purity is necessary not for Allāh, but for us. That we may be pure, He has graciously prescribed the religious duty to bathe and make ablution. There are self-righteous fanatics who abstain from eating pork, but not from devouring human rights; who call it unlawful to eat blood, yet kill human beings; who talk of

wine as forbidden, yet consume the property of orphans, who stress the unlawfulness of adultery, yet indulge in slander.

It is quite correct to say that Allāh forbids the eating of pork, but it is also unlawful to devour human rights. Indeed, the latter is a greater sin. Allāh may waive His rights, but the rights of His servants are not be waived. He has certainly forbidden the consumption of blood, but He has also made it unlawful to take human life:

Whoever kills a believer deliberately, his recompense is Hell, where he shall dwell forever, and Allāh is wroth with him and curses him, and prepares for him an awful doom. [4:93].

Not only wine, but all intoxicating drinks are definitely unlawful, but it is equally certain that Hellfire awaits those who consume the property of orphans:

Surely those who consume the wealth of orphans unjustly, they take into their bellies naught but fire, and they shall be roasted in a blazing flame. [4:10].

Allāh has indeed forbidden adultery and fornication, but our Master has told us that lying and backbiting are even worse than those dreadful sins. As for sloth, there is no one more odious to Allāh and His blessed Messenger than a lazy person. The enemies of Allāh also include employers who exploit their workers, and people who eat in front of others without sharing their food.

The Pilgrimage should be made for the sake of Allāh, not to acquire the title of Hajji. Do not break a human heart. Though you construct a hundred thousand Ka°ba's, if you break one heart you are ruined. The Ka°ba in Mecca was built by the blessed Abraham, but Allāh created the heart.

The first state of purity is that required for ritual prayer; if broken it can be restored by ablution. The second is the purity of faith. It is broken if one lies, slanders, hits, slaps, beats, commits murder, or violates the other prohibitions of Allāh; nor is it such an easy matter to restore the purity of faith.

This world is a testing ground, the field of the Hereafter. Did you ever see a farmer sow wheat and then reap barley at harvest time? Let us forsake our bad habits; let us abandon our sloth. Let us gain both this world and the Next, by working for that homeland in Paradise, by striving, by loving and respecting one another, by putting mutual assistance in the place of malice and envy, and by never forsaking Allāh and His blessed Messenger Muhammad. There is actually no fire in Hell; it is we who prepare the fire and take it there with us …

Bahlūl Seeks Fire In Hell, But Comes Away Empty-Handed

Bahlūl the Wise Fool, one of God's Own, happened one day to meet the Caliph Harūn al-Rāshīd. "Where are you coming from like this, Bahlūl?" the ruler asked him. "From Hell," was the prompt reply. Harūn, astonished, put another question: "What were you doing there?" Bahlūl explained: "Fire was needed, Sire, so I thought of going to Hell to ask if they could spare a little. But the fellow in charge there said: 'We have no fire here.' Of

course I asked him: ‘How come? Isn’t Hell the place of fire?’ His answer was: ‘I tell you, there really is no fire down here. Everybody brings his own fire with him when he comes.’ ”

In sheer amazement, Harūn al-Rāshīd asked yet another question: “Tell me, Bahlūl, what should I do so that I shan’t take any fire down there?” Bahlūl the Wise Fool made off at top speed, crying: “Justice … Justice … Justice …”

Allāh is Forgiving and Compassionate. He says: “I come running to meet those who walk toward Me.” Thus He reminds us that we should in no way abandon hope. May Allāh bestow His guidance on us all. Amen, for the sake of the Chief of the Messengers.

THE THREE LEVELS OF FAITH

Faith in Allāh is on three levels: Certainty of Knowledge, Certainty of Vision, and Certainty of Truth.

1. Certainty of Knowledge (‘ilm al-yaqīn): Suppose we are told the name of a city, e.g., “Bursa is a city in Turkey.” Now we know, as a matter of information, that a city of that name exists, though we have not been there and seen it. This is “Certainty of Knowledge.”

2. Certainty of Vision (‘ayn al-yaqīn): The time comes when we want to see that city, so we take the road toward it. As we approach we get a panoramic view; it now becomes apparent whether the city stands at the foot of a

mountain or by a lake or sea, how great an area it covers, what its buildings are like … Once we have come close enough to the city to perceive all these things, our knowledge has reached the level of “Certainty of Vision.” Before, we had only heard of the place, but now we have seen it with our own eyes and we realize that the city does indeed exist.

3. Certainty of Truth (haqq al-yaqīn): A rational person is not disposed to turn back satisfied merely with a view from afar. He must go right into the city and look around its streets, its various quarters, its buildings. Now at last he can walk around and inspect the city inch by inch. After hearing about it, then seeing it with our own eyes, we have finally lived in the city and come to know it at first hand. Our knowledge is now at the level of “Certainty of Truth.”

We have passed from Certainty of Knowledge, by hearing, through Certainty of Vision, by seeing, to reach the level of Certainty of Truth, where we experience directly, by tasting—all this we have illustrated by means of a worldly example.

We have heard from the divine Messengers that God exists, that He is One, and that He is the Owner and Creator of the entire Universe; we have believed in what has thus been reported to us. This faith is at the level of Certainty of Knowledge. All who have powers of intellect, perception and comprehension possess faith on this level. In short, the faith common to all believers is at the level of Certainty of Knowledge.

When it comes to God’s commands, some people adopt a highly indifferent attitude. They confess God’s existence and His oneness, yet they do not carry out His commands. Or if they do so at all, it is with reluctance and bad grace. Naturally, nobody can expect such people to rise to a higher

degree. Should they fail to repent and seek forgiveness before they pass on to the Other World, they will fall into great disgrace when they are brought into the Divine Presence. May Allāh preserve us all from being like this. Amen, for the sake of the Chief of the Messengers.

Those, on the contrary, who are extremely attentive to God's commands and wish to fulfill them, as we have explained above, are the beloved servants of Allāh.

The eagerness and enthusiasm shown by such people in carrying out His commands are among the states most pleasing to God. Although they may not yet have reached the level of Certainty of Vision, they ought not to forget that they belong among the group that may be summoned to that degree. If only they do not stray from the path! Moreover, these are the strongest candidates for the degree of Certainty of Truth, provided they are extremely fastidious and extremely conscientious with respect to Allāh's commandments, paying no attention to all those worldly pleasures and diversions that appear so attractive and satisfying but are at variance with His wishes. Here there is something I would like to make particularly clear, as I am concerned about a possible misunderstanding. Certain people are going to say: "Well then, are we to do nothing in this world but worship, are we not entitled to any entertainment, any relaxation?" It must therefore be stressed that the worldly pleasures and diversions we referred to as needing to be shunned, are those at variance with — contrary to — Allāh's commands in the Qur'ān. Otherwise, those who truly observe these commands are at liberty to enjoy worldly recreations. They may pursue all permissible forms of entertainment. All that is demanded is the meticulous observance of propriety, chastity, honor, dignity and self-respect. Any entertainment injurious to these qualities is not really entertainment at all, it is a vice and a waste of time, doubly pernicious to humanity.

The believer who already possesses those attributes that will qualify him to enter this degree, has become not only a beloved servant of Allāh, but one whom He also appreciates and commends. He will be told: “Since you have made such exertions to get this close to Me, I am not going to let these strenuous efforts of yours come to nothing. I am showing you My Beauty, for which you have felt such longing.” In all the things of this world, that person now sees, feels and senses the existence of God. For him the world no longer contains any of those distressing things like spiritual malaise, moral vacuum, worry, gloom and anxiety; his heart has achieved pure contentment. Allāh, Glorified is He, transcends all human categories. Just as a little cup must overflow when a great ocean is poured into it, those to whom He displays His Beauty may well fail to contain themselves in contemplation of this surpassing splendor, as did Ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj and Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī. When the finite ocean cannot be contained within the largest vessels, let alone this small cup, how should God’s infinite bliss do other than overflow? Of course it overflows and then, like Hallāj, they say: “Anā-l-Haqq” (“I am the Truth”).

As we have said, Allāh appreciates and commends those who reach the rank of Certainty of Vision. But there is an even higher degree beyond this, namely the rank of Certainty of Truth. Those who ascend to this rank are the most meticulous, most fastidious and most obedient of all in observing God’s commands and prohibitions. They perform with sensitivity, as well as with desire and longing, not only all obligatory and customary duties, but also those acts of worship and obedience we call supererogatory, their performance or non-performance being entirely optional. Moreover, there ceases to be any formality or ceremony between such people and Allāh; all veils are removed. They are with Allāh; they are in Allāh. This is what is meant when we speak of being with Allāh and being in Allāh.

Furthermore, for those who enter this grade certain things become positively unlawful although they are normally classed as “indifferently permissible” (mubāh), meaning that there is neither sin nor merit in either

doing them or leaving them undone. For the rest of us there is no sin involved in activities belonging to this category, such as our simple pastimes and amusements (provided, of course, that these are in no way contrary to God's commands). For those, on the other hand, who are at the level of Certainty of Truth, even these are forbidden. In their case it is sinful merely to think of anything other than Allāh.

In case the point of this is unclear, let us take another example from worldly life, for there is nothing in this world that is not a sample of the Hereafter. In other words, whatever exists in the Hereafter must—absolutely must—have some expression, model, pattern and indication in this world. Seek and ye shall find.

Well then, in this world everybody has some occupation or profession, some calling or vocation. Each profession has its own particular dignity and prestige. Then again, within each profession there is an assortment of individuals working and earning their livelihood. Some get on top of their jobs and make a good living, while others find it hard to make ends meet because they cannot be bothered to put in an honest day's work. One may get into financial straits, or see one's efforts come to naught—despite hard work and enthusiasm—through failure to grasp the fine points of the job.

The above example illustrates the situation of people in the grade of Certainty of Knowledge. Now among these professional people there are some who get ahead in their professions and come to be very widely known, liked, esteemed and respected, and generally held in high regard. They can live in comfort and own money and property. Such people get put up for public office; everyone knows that a man is genuinely recognized within his profession for his honesty and integrity, so they put him forward unanimously as being of the right caliber to administer their affairs also. This grade corresponds to the level of Certainty of Truth.

Once he has been elected to such high office, a person can no longer enjoy the same freedom of movement as before. Should he persist in ignoring this fact he will soon find himself demoted from his position. For instance, if a man who has important duties neglects them to spend a lot of time having fun like other people, that man will be deemed unworthy of his post and will soon be stripped of his rank.

To draw a parallel here, we may say that great saints who have attained the rank of Certainty of Truth can get into sin by way of certain actions, despite the fact that those actions are ordinarily indifferent and would not entail any sin for the rest of us. The case corresponds exactly with our example. The learned expression of this is the Arabic saying: hasanātu-l'abrār, sayyi'ātu-l'muqarrabin. (The virtues of simple good men are the vices of those brought near the Divine Presence.)

We have seen what a big difference in importance separates the holder of high office from the ordinary professional man; equally vast is the gulf between ourselves on the level of Certainty of Knowledge and the Saints who have reached the levels of Certainty of Vision and Certainty of Truth. As for where we stand in relation to the Prophet, on him be peace …

Do I hear the question: "Have we no possibility of ever reaching beyond this Certainty of Knowledge ?" Then let me explain again:

That man who held high office must certainly, on his way to achieving such rank, have passed through many intermediate stages, at each of which he proved his suitability by his attitude and behavior, his honesty and decency. He must also have gone through study and training, etc. Anyone who

follows the same course can undoubtedly rise to the same position, provided only that he fulfill all the aforementioned conditions. Let me put it in a nutshell. Anyone who carries out God's command over a long period and with progressively increasing precision and sensitivity, and always with respect, and who loves His dearly Beloved above absolutely everything—wealth, property, status, family and so on, including himself—there is nothing to prevent such a servant from being a saint. But only on condition that he fulfill all the stipulations we have mentioned. In a fundamental sense, every believer who acknowledges and has faith in Allāh and His blessed Messenger, and follows the path, is already a saint, is the friend of Allāh. The difference between us and the great saints is by reason of this abundance of good deeds and immensity of affection.

A Future Saint is Tested By His Spiritual Guide

Among the pupils of a certain spiritual guide there was one whose every movement and attitude showed him to be noble of soul, perceptive and intelligent. It was natural that the spiritual guide should display a particularly great affection toward the young man.

This state of affairs was more than could be stomached by a few spiteful students, as well as some ignorant outsiders, and as they could not keep their nasty thoughts to themselves they started loose talk. For the truth is that a spiteful, envious person thinks everyone is like himself. If a man wears a dirty pair of glasses, the world will look dirty as he sees it. Those who wear black or green lenses will view the world in those colors.

The spiritual guide was pained by this gossiping, the more so on his pupil's behalf. Eventually he decided to teach the gossip-mongers the lesson they

deserved, or rather to vindicate his pupil's worth and value, so he let it be known that he would set his students a test.

On the day of the examination he said to his pupils: "I want each of you to fetch a chicken, after killing it in a secret, out-of-the-way place with nobody watching you. We shall see what you notice or fail to observe while killing the bird. But the condition I set is that you must have nobody near you and must let no one see you doing the killing." They all ran off in different directions to carry out this instruction at once, then came back with the chicken they had killed. They all explained to their teacher that they had been quite alone while doing the deed, and that they had obeyed the command to the letter. Only that one pupil was still missing. As they were whispering furtively among themselves: "He has not done what the teacher asked, and hasn't the nerve to show up," the pupil appeared in the doorway, sad and dejected and holding a live chicken in his hand. They all laughed up their sleeves. Students and teacher were equally happy at having their respective notions verified.

The teacher asked: "Why did you not carry out my command like the others? Why have you brought your chicken back alive, instead of cutting its throat?"

The pupil replied: "Beneficent master, far from contradicting your instructions in the least, I would sacrifice my very life for you. But you sent us out to do this task under the stipulation that we perform it with nobody watching. No matter where I went, no matter where I tried to hide so that I could kill the chicken, I knew Allāh could see me. I no longer had the heart to do it. .

At this, the teacher turned his gaze upon the other students. Every one of them was hanging his head in shame. There was nothing more to be said.

The pupil in that story was to become the great Saint known as Aziz Mahmud Hüdai of Scutari, sanctified be his spirit, whose blessed tomb is now to be found in the neighborhood of that town. His teacher was the venerable Üftade. (The same story is attributed to Abū Hanīfa.)

May Allāh sanctify their spirits and those of all His saints. Amen, for the sake of the Chief of the Messengers.

It was some considerable time after the episode recounted above that the venerable Üftade appointed his disciple to succeed him, and authorized him to transmit spiritual guidance. This was how the venerable Hüdai had successfully passed the qualifying test:

The venerable Üftade had just recovered from a heavy bout of influenza. It was winter time and the water was too cold for him to use in his ablution when he got up for his early morning prayer, so his pupil, the venerable Hüdai, always got up some time before his master and warmed some water for him over the fire. But then one frosty morning he noticed that his master was already awake. He jumped up with a cry of dismay, hastily grabbed the pitcher and held it tight against his breast. The venerable Üftade rolled up his sleeves and held his arms over the basin, but the water poured from the pitcher scalded his hand as he tried to make ablution. Staring in amazement at his beloved disciple, he said: “Hüdai, where did you boil this?”

On hearing the reply: “On the fire of the heart, my sultan!”, the venerable Üftade responded with the plea: “God willing, may sultans walk in your train, my beloved son.”

It was after this incident that he dispatched him to Uskudar, saying: “It is a waste of your talents to keep you here. Off you go, into the arena of spiritual guidance and the training of men.”

The venerable Hüdai lived into the reign of the Ottoman Emperor Sultan Ahmed I; he was instrumental in getting that ruler to build the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, and in the choice of site for it opposite the Aya Sofya Mosque in Sultan Ahmed Square. When Sultan Ahmed asked: “Well then, with what endowment shall we fund the mosque?”, he answered: “With the proceeds of the Austrian campaign.” On another occasion, Sultan Ahmed was traveling with a retinue of dignitaries when he encountered the venerable Hüdai. As an expression of his respect for his revered teacher, the Emperor Sultan Ahmed Khan invited him insistently to mount the imperial horse; having seated him in the saddle, he walked, holding the reins, in the venerable Hüdai’s train. After a little while, Hüdai sought permission to dismount, which he did while explaining: “Glory be to Allāh! My mercifully deceased teacher once prayed that sultans might walk in my train; that has now come to pass. It was to make my teacher’s spirit happy that I accepted your pressing invitation, Emperor of the World.”

Highly instructive lessons are to be drawn from this, as from the thousands of other supernatural events in the history of the Sultans of the Heart, the Emperors of the Visionary Realm, the Saints of God.

The moral we need to draw from these marvelous exploits is this: We must do our utmost not to involve ourselves in things that do not enjoy Divine

approval, bearing in mind that Allāh sees, hears and knows not only every single thing we do wherever we may do it, but even those things we only think of doing without actually carrying them out. In this regard see what hopeful and encouraging news is brought by the blessed Messenger. According to a noble Tradition he said: “If a person has so much as an atom of faith (faith in Allāh and His Messenger), I promise to intercede for him on the Day of Reckoning and that there is a possibility he may be pardoned.”

When he was asked the meaning of an atom’s worth of faith he said: “If a person forgets one of the prayers for which a set time is prescribed and leaves it to be made up later, and if when he realizes that the time has passed his heart feels a pang as he says, Alas, the prayer must be made up,’ that person is one who has an atom’s worth of faith.”

The fear of Allāh is thus of two kinds. One is fearing His Punishment, His Hell … This is the common man’s fear. The other is experienced by those who fear that their Lord may not address them as “My servant!”, dismiss them from His Service and not admit them to His Beauty and Union … This is the fear of God’s friends and saints. We have already discussed the meaning of these terms.

Those who have this kind of fear of Allāh burnish their hearts through remembrance of Him; whenever they hear a Verse of the Qur’ān, a Noble Tradition or the words of the Truth, their hearts are illumined and the light of their faith increases. As the light increases, they experience manifestations in their prayers. The ritual prayers they perform become for them a heavenly ascension. Their hearts become calm and reflect upon the state of the hungry and the homeless. But they do not stop at reflection, they extend to them the hand of tenderness and compassion and assistance, they guard and protect. They are aware that these blessings they receive come to

them only from Allāh, that they are merely trustees or watchmen in relation to their rank, wealth and money, and that all these things will one day be taken away. Therefore they do all they possibly can to help strangers, lonely orphans and old people, the needy and victims of oppression who hide away unable to beg and make their poverty known. This they do without expecting any recompense, gratitude or service in return, never losing sight of the possibility that they themselves might fall into such conditions. They work without advertisement, hypocrisy or ostentation, always too tactful to say “Look, I am helping you.” Thus they perform with purity of heart the good works dearest to Allāh and most acceptable in His sight, thereby achieving Divine Approval.

The venerable Anas ibn Mālik has reported on the authority of our Master, the Lord’s Beloved, that such charitable action constitutes a remedy for as many as seventy kinds of misfortune, which we shall not detail here.

Whereas zakāh is given only to Muslims, charity (sadaqa) may be given to anyone at all. Its benefits are absolutely obvious both in this world and in the Hereafter.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARITY

A Poor Peasant Woman Sees Her Charity Rewarded

A certain poor peasant woman once satisfied the request of a beggar who approached her by giving him the last morsel she possessed. The beggar prayed for her, saying: “May Allāh credit you in this world and the

Hereafter with this morsel you have given me; may He bestow blessings upon you."

Sometime later when she went to help her husband in the fields, that peasant woman laid her beautiful baby down under a tree to sleep. Being deeply absorbed in their work, the husband and wife were slow to notice that a fierce wolf had crept up to the place where the child was lying, used its fangs to get hold of the baby's clothes and carried it off into the forest. After a long chase, the wolf was so far ahead of them that the parents lost hope of recovering their child and became crazed with grief. At that very moment a stranger appeared, seized the wolf, took the baby from the mouth of the beast and laid it down safely, then felled the wolf to the ground and killed it. Pointing to the child, the stranger called out: "That morsel you gave the beggar was a substitute for this morsel." Then the parents, terrified and bewildered, saw him disappear from that place.

The Prophet Abraham Learns the Value of Charity

Our Master's ancestor, the blessed Prophet Abraham, is known as Khalīlu-llāh, meaning God's Friend. In the course of performing our ritual prayers, both obligatory and customary, we Muslims mention his blessed name a total of fifty-six times each day. For his plea was accepted when he entreated the Lord God: "You have graciously told me the worth and value in Your sight of one of my descendants, the Primal Light and Messenger-to-be, Muhammad, on him be peace, and of the favors he will confer upon his Community. My Lord, let my name also not be absent from their tongues." So it is that the mention of his name is an important element in the ritual prayers performed by the Community of Muhammad, on him be peace.

This Prophet, whose name is mentioned together with those of Allāh and His Messenger, would never touch food unless there was a beggar in his house. When no beggar came for two or three days, the venerable Abraham began to wonder if it was through some fault of his own that God had not sent a poor man to him. But the next day there came a knock at the door. He opened the door, to see before him a man with tousled hair and beard, covered in dust and dirt. As soon as he noticed the state the man was in, the Prophet Abraham realized that he could not be a Muslim, so he asked him what his religion was. “I am a Magian,” said the man, “I worship fire.” When he heard this, the blessed Abraham thought of getting him out of his idolatry and preventing him from ascribing partners to Allāh, so he sent the old man away empty-handed with these words in his ears: “I cannot help unbelievers who attribute partners to Allāh and wander about in this condition. Go away till you have repented, asked forgiveness of God, embraced Islam and cleaned yourself up. Then you will come back to an open door.” But when the Prophet Abraham was alone, he heard these words from on high:

“Abraham, since I, with My Godhead, do not deny him sustenance, despite the fact that he has disobeyed Me and committed the one sin I do not pardon, namely that of attributing partners to Me, how could you—My servant—send him away without even a crust of bread? Go and make it up to him at once. If you had done this for your own sake, rather than to please Me, I would have wiped you from My Friendship.”

On receiving this divine command, the Prophet Abraham took to the road until he found the stranger in Medina. Treating him kindly, he brought him to his house, fed him well and put things to rights between them. The point was not lost on the idolater, either. Instead of addressing the fire as “idol” (sanam), he suddenly turned to Allāh, the Eternal (samad). He had been blessed with the honor of true faith.

The Revelation of the Verse: “As For the Beggar … ”

One day the venerable Abū Bakr spotted some fresh dates in the market. He bought a quantity as a present for the Prophet, the Glory of the Universe. But just as he brought the dates into the blessed presence, saying: “Will you not accept these dates, O Prophet of God?” a beggar came up and said: “O Prophet of God, won’t you give those dates to me?”

Restraining his own appetite, the Glorious Prophet gave every last date to the beggar. When this matter came to the attention of the venerable °Umar, he gave the beggar something in place of the dates and brought them back to the Prophetic presence. But the same beggar approached once again, saying: “Messenger of God, won’t you give me the dates?” The Messenger of Allāh ate not a single date before giving them all back to the beggar. The same procedure was re-enacted four times. On the fourth occasion the venerable Imām °Alī had just set the dates before God’s Messenger when the beggar reappeared, pleading: “Be generous and give those dates to me.” This time our Master, the Messenger of Allāh, asked the beggar: “Are you a beggar or a merchant?” The glorious divine command was thereupon sent down:

As for the beggar, brush him not aside. [93:10]

Begging is unlawful in Islam. But it is also unlawful to reject the petitioner, provided the thing he wants is not unreasonable.

Let us make sure we never forget the significance of this Verse and these stories, let us not waste this light, these blessings that have been bestowed

upon us. Let us not stray even for one instant from the path of Allāh and His dearly Beloved. In all our undertakings let us try to act as he acted. Let us model our whole behavior pattern upon his. If we know too little about him, let us learn, make an effort to learn, want to learn. God will not deny us such a wish; He will have us meet him both here and There; He will attach us to the group of His favorite servants. I swear by God that those who behave in this way, with purity and sincerity of heart, not deviating in the slightest from the path of Muhammad, God bless him and give him peace, are absolutely certain to achieve in a very short time bounties and privileges so enormous that any description of them would mean less than an atom of all the suns we can count—or rather cannot count—or than a drop from all the oceans.

Ibrāhīm Ad'ham Enumerates the Ten Bad Qualities

Shaqīq of Balkh tells this story about Ibrāhīm Ad'ham, who was once ruler of Khurāsān:

Some time after he had forsaken his kingship and become a sultan of the heart, he happened to be going about the city of Basra when the people of that town gathered round him, complaining: "O father of Isaac[1], although God says in the Qur'ān: 'Call upon Me, and I will answer your prayers,' we have prayed many times and yet our prayers have not been accepted." Ibrāhīm Ad'ham, may God sanctify his spirit, replied with this terse advice: "Because of ten things your hearts are dead; if a person has these ten bad qualities in him, how should God accept his prayers?" Then he enumerated one by one the ten bad habits of the people of Basra.

The Prophets and saints are like mirrors; just as the mirror shows us the dirt on our faces, so did this most worthy being demonstrate their faults to the

people of Basra.

It is said: “Clean your face instead of casting aspersions on the mirror.” But we would rather break the mirror than give up our bad habits and wipe the dirt from our faces.

And so he began to count: “These are your shortcomings:

1. You acknowledge Allāh, you pretend to acknowledge Him, and yet you do not give His due. God’s due is help for the needy …

2. You read the Qur’ān, yet you do not observe its commands and prohibitions, do not practice what you read.

3. Although you say that Satan is your enemy, you follow him and obey him.

4. You call yourselves members of Muhammad’s Community, yet you do not follow the example set by the Messenger.

5. You claim that you will go to Paradise, yet you do none of the deeds that must be performed to gain access there.

6. You wish to achieve salvation from the Fire, yet you throw yourselves into it by the bad deeds you do.

7. You know that death is the Truth and you say so, yet you make no preparation for it.

8. You pay a lot of attention to the faults of your brothers in religion, yet you do not see your own faults.

9. You consume the bounty of your Lord without giving thanks to Him (The way to show gratitude for this is to feed others in turn).

10. You bury your dead without taking warning, as if the same end will not befall you also."

With these words he enlightened not only the Basrans and ourselves, but all believers till the Resurrection. God's mercy be upon him.

O Lord, graciously afford us the gift of faith, and include us among those who achieve success and find salvation from the Fire. Amen! …

Now let us return to the meaning of the noble Verse:

Only they are believers, whose hearts are illumined when they make Remembrance of God or hear Remembrance of Him.

Remembrance means recalling something forgotten. But if a person is "heedless of God" there is no use in his saying "Allāh" one thousand or even one hundred thousand times. For his deeds do not match his words; that is to say, on the one hand he mentions Allāh, but on the other he shows no restraint in doing things Allāh has forbidden. Every time that person says "Allāh," a voice tells him: "You're a liar," but it falls on deaf ears. Consider this analogy: Somebody keeps on saying: "Bread, bread, bread." But if he gets no bread to eat, has he any chance of filling his belly merely by repeating the word "bread"? Such repetition will actually result only in making his mouth water and tiring him out. To satisfy his hun ger it is absolutely necessary for him to eat the bread itself. Exactly as in our ex ample, in order to taste the sweetness of pronouncing the Name of God, to find Allāh, to be in Allāh, it is necessary for us to worship and obey Him in the way He wishes, to observe His every command and prohibition, ever conscious and aware that—even if we do not see Him in Person—He certainly sees us, and that He surely sees and hears us everywhere and in all circumstances better than we see and hear ourselves, and that He is nearer to us than we are to ourselves; this is called Faith of Certainty and Ihsān[2]. As we explained above, Faith of Certainty emerges in those who wish, strive and finally succeed in being as close as possible to Allāh. In Sufism, the technical term for this is the Station of Direct Contemplation (maqām al-mushāhada). This station is an attribute of sainthood. But it is impossible for those who reach this station, even for a saint, to remain permanently in the grace of the Station of Direct Contemplation. While on this earth human beings lack the capacity to survive indefinitely in the grace of these divine manifestations. Let us consider a relevant instance:

Imām °Alī used to say: "I do not worship a God I have not seen." Now during the battle of Uhud a flying arrow struck Imām °Alī in the leg. He tried his best to pull it out, but the wound was causing too much physical

pain. Then he turned to his comrades and said: “Pull out the arrow while I am performing the prayer.” When he had completed the prayer by turning his head to the left and pronouncing the greeting of peace, he asked if they had removed the arrow—but it had been extracted while he was still performing his prayer. This event shows that Imām ºAlī was at the Station of Direct Contemplation throughout the time he was praying, and that he was then unaware of the physical pain he felt the rest of the time.

At the moment of death, true believers will experience union with the Divine Beauty, union with the Beloved, and death for them will be “just like pulling hairs from butter.”[3]

This is made clear and confirmed for us by this episode in the Holy Qur’ān:

The Story of Joseph

The brothers of Joseph, on him be peace, were so envious of him and so resentful of the great love held for him by their father Jacob, that they asked their father to let them take Joseph with them when they set off on a journey. Joseph, who lived in a place called the land of Canaan, came face to face during the journey with the treacherous designs of his brothers. They threw him into a well, from which it was impossible to climb out unaided. Glad to have disposed of him, his brothers resolved to make up a plausible lie, telling their father that he had been savaged by wolves. To provide evidence of their story, they smeared blood on his shirt and took it away with them. After some time, a caravan en route to Egypt sighted that well. They hurried to it in the hope of drawing water and let down a bucket. But instead of the sound of water, they heard a groan, whereupon they promptly pulled up the owner of the voice, treated his wounds and took him with them to Egypt, where they offered him for sale as a slave. He was noticed in

the slave-market by Potiphar, the governor of Egypt who, amazed by his beauty, his nobility of countenance and radiant appearance, bought him, and took him off to his palace as a slave. But Potiphar's wife, the lady Zulaykha, was overwhelmed by this beauty and radiance, the like of which she had never seen before, and she lost her heart to Joseph. The rumour that the governor's wife had fallen in love with his servant quickly became the sole topic of conversation and discussion among the society of the day.

Eventually Zulaykha decided to put a stop to all this gossip, and to let the tongue-waggers see for themselves how little she could be blamed. She therefore invited all the society ladies of Egypt to a great banquet. Following the meal, fruit and a knife were set on a plate in front of each guest. They had begun to peel their fruit when Zulaykha judged that the time had come to summon Joseph into the hall. As soon as they saw Joseph in the doorway, the ladies all started cutting their fingers instead of their fruit, without even noticing what they were doing. When Zulaykha saw this, she first sent Joseph out of the room, then said to the ladies: "Now stop cutting your hands and peel your fruit!" They all begged pardon of Zulaykha, saying: "This is no man, but a noble angel!" as they struggled to wipe up the blood dripping from their fingers.

Just as the ladies who saw Joseph's beauty did not feel any pain when they cut their hands, so the believer who catches sight of the Divine Beauty, the beauty of the Messenger, or Paradise, will be insensitive to the pain of death.

This explains why martyrs wish to experience martyrdom over and over again. They are honored with divine manifestations.

We know from the noble Tradition that such entreaties are indeed made by martyrs in the cause of Allāh.

“O Lord, send us back into the world so that we may repeat our martyrdom, then send us yet again that we may be martyred once more. O Lord, we implore you to let us taste over and over again the joy we know in our moment of martyrdom.” Who but God and the martyrs themselves can know the joy of that moment?

And yet, even for those who acquire this degree of nearness, this degree of proximity to Allāh, there is no possibility of total knowledge of all God’s secrets. In our parable, we may enter the city, walk around and inspect the streets, quarters, and buildings, yet we could never get to examine the inside of every house or room. It is equally impossible even for those who are capable of attaining this Certainty of Truth to get to know God’s endless secrets completely.

The one and only noble creature to enjoy this privilege, the one and only human being, the one and only servant of God, is he to whom Allāh said: “I created this universe for your sake,” our Master Muhammad, may God bless him and give him peace.

Allāh, who created all those worlds, suns and stars, this earth and others like it, prehistoric epochs and the ages after the Resurrection, Paradises and Hells, earth and skies and seas and creatures therein so enormous and dreadful as to strike terror in those who might behold them, as well as millions and millions of creatures invisible to the naked eye and hard to see even with microscopes, each separate atom and also the totality of the skies and seas, places the existence of which we do not yet suspect and all the creatures in those places, animals, plants and that human being the like of

whom we shall never be able to reproduce; Allāh, who brings this human being into complete and perfect form, starting from a drop of “water”; Allāh, for whom there is not the slightest difficulty in all this, has proclaimed the glory and dignity of the reason for this entire creation in His majestic words: “But for you, but for you, I would not have created the spheres”—“Had you not existed I would not have created this universe”—“I created all these worlds for your sake, and I created you for Myself.” The one so addressed is:

The Desired of Allāh (Mergub-u-Hudā*)[4]

The Intercessor on Judgment Day (Shef-i Ruz-i-Jeza*)

The Refuge of the Poor (Melje-i-Fukara*)

The Friend of the Weak (Enis-iz-Zuafa*)

The Beloved of Allāh (Mahbub-u-Huda*)

The Master of the Sword (Sahib-i-Seyf*)

The Master of the Book (Sahibu-l-Kitab)

The Chief of the Prophets (Serdar-i-Enbiya*)

The Messenger of the Almighty (Resul-i-Kibriya*)

The Master of the Two Bow Lengths (Sahib-i-Kābe Kavseyn*)

The Imām of the Two Sanctuaries (Imamu-l-Haramayn)

The Grandfather of Hasan and Husayn (Jaddu-l-Hasanayn)

The Master of Intercession (Sahib-i-Shefaat*)

The Master of the Praiseworthy Station (Sahib-i-Makam-ul-Mahmud*)

The Chosen Messenger (Resul-u-Mujtebā*)

The Messenger of Men and Jinn (Resul-u-Sakaleyn*)

The Prophet of the Two Sanctuaries (Nabiyyu-l-Haramayn)

The Imām of the Two Directions of Prayer (Imamu-l-Qiblatayn)

The Master of the Heavenly Ascension (Sahibu-l-Mi’raj)

The Master of al-Rafraf[5] (Sahibu-l-Raf-Raf)

The Master of Miracles (Sahibu-l-Mūjizat)

The Master of the Qur’ān (Sahibu-l-Qur’ān)

Think of the joy of gaining admission to the Beautiful Presence of Allāh, Magnificent is His Glory, Who is the Creator and Lord of our Master Muhammad, God bless him and give him peace! For this favor will be granted to the Community of Muhammad. The story of Joseph we related above is clear evidence of this. For the genuine believer, union with the Divine Beauty is waiting at the gate of death. There are many who reach this Station from here, from this lower world. The words of the venerable Imām °Alī: “I do not worship a Lord I do not see” are the proof, the witness to those attaining this Station.

NOTES

[1]A play on the fact that he bore the name of the Prophet Abraham (Ibrāhīm in Arabic).

[2]‘Beneficence’—acting as if we could see Allāh, for He surely sees us.

[3]The vivid Turkish figure of speech indicating extreme ease and smoothness.

[4]The transliteration of these noble names is from the Arabic; those marked with an asterisk (*) are transliterated from the Ottoman.

[5]The heavenly creature that bore the Prophet, on him be peace, on the final stage of his Ascension.

THE FOURTH DISCOURSE

“ … a Mercy to All the Worlds”

Bismi’llāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

The Creation of the World, of Adam and of the Light-of-Muhammad.

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Stories

How Imām °Alī spared the life of an enemy.

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Bilāl endures torture for the sake of his faith; his deliverance.

A simple tribesman asks about the Resurrection and learns the value of Love for Allāh.

Bless our Master, Muhammad

Bless our Teacher, Muhammad

Bless the Early Morning Sun, Muhammad

Bless the Full Moon of Night, Muhammad

Bless the Light of Guidance, Muhammad

Lord, open my breast and ease my task for me. Unloose a knot from my tongue, that they may understand my words … [20:27]

I entrust my affairs to Allāh; surely Allāh sees His servants. [40:44]

Allāh knows every secret of His servants; He sees and hears all that they do. Just as He has gathered us here, so on the coming Day of Resurrection may He graciously assemble us beneath the Banner of Praise of His dearly beloved Muhammad Mustafā—Allāh bless him and give him peace. Amen. Allāh tells His blessed Messenger:

We have not sent you except as a Mercy to all worlds. [21:107]

O Prophet, We have sent you as a witness, a bringer of good tidings and a warner; and as one summoning to Allāh by His leave, and as a lamp shedding light. Tell the believers the good news that there is great bounty for them from God. [33:45]

* * *

We praise, extol and prostrate ourselves before Allāh, Exalted is He, the Sole Owner, Lord and Sustainer of everything in heaven and earth, of all worlds known and unknown. Our worship belongs to Him alone, our All-Providing Creator. He causes to be; He causes not to be. He exalts and He abases. Everything is His. He is the First and the Last; the Outer and the Inner. He has power over all things; He has true knowledge of all things. There is no end to His mercy. All sovereignty is His; all things shall return to Him. He has concealed His Essence from our eyes, but has made Himself apparent through the Beauty of Muhammad, Allāh bless him and give him peace, for He has loved him, praised him and exalted his remembrance. All the Prophets, including Adam and Jesus, peace be upon them every one, announced the good tidings of his coming; all the Messengers implored the Lord God to let them belong to his Community.

To Muhammad, then, be endless blessings and peace. Greetings and salutations to that being of great glory and noble worth, that mercy to all worlds, that rose of the rose garden, one of whose names is Ahmad (“Most Praiseworthy”); likewise to his family, his offspring, his companions and his friends. Amen.

* * *

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD, OF ADAM, AND OF THE LIGHT-OF-MUHAMMAD

Believers, you should know that the most noble of creatures are the angels, men and jinn. And the noblest of these is man:

Indeed We have honored the children of Adam. We carry them over land and sea. We have provided good things for them, and have preferred them greatly over many of those We have created. [17:70]

Indeed We have created man in fairest form. [95:4]

Man has been created as the most honored, most perfect, most beautiful and most complete of all creatures. Man is the vicegerent of Allāh:

When your Lord told the angels: ‘I am placing a vicegerent on the earth’, they said: “Will you place on it one who will make mischief there and shed blood, while we hymn Your praise and sanctify You?’ He said: ‘Surely I know what you know not.’ [2:30]

By this Divine Word the dignity of Man is established. In short, everything that exists has been created for Man’s sake. And of all mankind the noblest, most beautiful and most perfect is the Revered Prophet, Allāh bless him and give him peace. And he was sent as a Mercy to all worlds.

Let it be known that Allāh, Creator and Lord of the Universe, created us humans superior to angels, jinn, animals and plants, and gave us control over the material worlds. To us He subordinated the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the continents, the oceans and the skies. He created man most noble of all, “in fairest form.” As the Holy Tradition puts it: “Son of Adam, I created all that exists for you, and you I created for Myself.”

In the infinite variety of this creation, as He has made plain to those with eyes to see, we have evidence and proofs by the thousand of His Existence and Oneness, of His Might and Majesty.

Before creating all these creatures without number, Allāh created a light from His Light. To that light He then said: “Become Muhammad!” and that light became the light of our blessed Master. That light acknowledged its Lord, saying: “There is no god but the One God, Allāh (Lā ilāha illā-llāh).” The Exalted One responded to this acknowledgment with: “Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.” This blessed sentence was the lock with which He locked the gate of Hell, the key with which He opened the eight doors of Paradise. The Noble Qur’ān bears witness to this eternal dialogue in many glorious chapters. For instance:

He it is Who has sent His Messenger

with guidance and the religion of truth,

to make it prevail over all religion.

And Allāh suffices as a witness. [48:28]

Allāh, Glorified is He, divided the one Light-of-Muhammad into four parts. Of the first part He created the Tablet and the Pen; the Pen wrote down what was decreed. Of the second part He created the Throne and the Seat, then commanded the Pen to inscribe upon the Throne: “There is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is Allāh’s Messenger (Lā ilāha illā-llāh; Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh).” Thus He indicated to His servants that His Messenger’s name was forever linked to His own. By inscribing those blessed words upon the Throne, He proclaimed to all creatures the splendor of His Messenger and his place in the sight of Allāh.

Of the third part of the light He created the sun, the moon and the stars. Of the fourth part He created Paradise and its pavilions, the beauties of this world and the Hereafter, the light of Adam, the angels and the jinn.

Next, He fashioned from the light a tree named the Tree of Certainty. He adorned the Prophetic Light with varied ornaments of white pearl, formed it in the shape of a peacock and set it upon that tree. After this Light-of-the-Prophet had been there for seventy thousand years, ever hymning the praise of the Lord All-Glorious and Exalted, Allāh created the Mirror of Modesty and set it before the blessed Light-of-Muhammad. When this peacock came to see the reflection of his own form, adornments and nature, he prostrated himself five times from modesty before Allāh, Exalted is He.[1]

When the Lord made Himself manifest to this blessed creature of light, a sense of shame produced drops of sweat from every part of his sacred body; these drops became the embryos from which all creatures were brought into

being. Thus the angels were created from the sweat of his head; the Throne and Seat, the Tablet and Pen, the sun, moon, stars and other heavenly bodies from the sweat of his face; the Prophets and Messengers, martyrs, champions, saints and righteous men from the sweat of his breast. From the sweat of his back were created the Meccan Sanctuary, the Noble Ka°ba, the Sanctuary in Jerusalem and all mosques in which prostration is made before Allāh. From the sweat of his brows was created the light of believing men and believing women …

Allāh, Exalted is He, then commanded this sacred bird to look to the four quarters. When he obeyed, he saw that four lights had been created. These were the lights of our Masters Abū Bakr the Veracious, °Umar the Discriminator, °Uthmān and °Alī, may Allāh be pleased with them all.

After the Prophetic Light had been there for a further seventy thousand years, still hymning the Lord's praise, the Exalted One made Himself manifest to these radiances and created their souls. These souls thereupon pronounced the Good Sentence: "There is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh."

Next, the Lord created a lamp of green agate, transformed the peacock into the beautiful earthly shape of our blessed Master, the Glory of the Universe, and set him inside this lamp. At that very moment He also created the souls of His creatures. For a thousand years the souls revolved around the lamp; for a thousand years the souls of the believers were engaged in hymning the praises of the Lord. After that, the command was given for all the souls to gaze upon the lamp. They looked toward it, and some of the believing souls beheld the head of the Light-of- the-Prophet; they became rulers in this world. Those who saw his forehead became just leaders. Those who saw his brows became impartial benefactors. Those who saw his nose became doctors. Those who beheld his lips, ministers; his mouth, keepers of the

fast; his teeth, people of beautiful countenance; his throat, preachers; his beard, charitable suppliers of water; his tongue, ambassadors; his shoulders, men-at-arms; his neck, merchants; his right arm, surgeons; his left arm, ignoramuses; the palm of his right hand, bankers; the palm of his left hand, butlers; the back of his right hand, generous givers; the back of his left hand, jewelers; the fingers of his right hand, calligraphers and orators; the fingers of his left hand, artists and smiths; his back, humble people; his sides, knights; his stomach, Qur'ān reciters; his knees, people who bow and prostrate themselves frequently in prayer; the soles of his feet, wanderers; his eyes, readers.

After this, the Exalted One placed this noble light beneath the Lofty Throne, where He preserved it until the creation of Adam. Allāh took the Light of the blessed Prophet Muhammad from beneath the Throne and set it on Adam's back. He then commanded all creatures to prostrate themselves before Adam, on him be peace.

It seems that the mercy of the Most Noble Messenger and Revered Prophet touched all the divinely created beings according to their several degrees. As it was in the Universe of Souls, so shall it be in this world and in the Hereafter.

Allāh, Exalted is He, declares in the Holy Qur'ān that He created His Beloved from His light, as a mercy to all worlds, and He extols his exalted splendor. According to its status, each creature has received his share of the Messenger's mercy; even inanimate objects have been blessed with existence; animate beings can enjoy food, drink and good health; unbelievers are not destroyed because of their unbelief, nor find themselves transformed into swine, monkeys or stones. It is due to the mercy of the Revered Prophet that sinners and unbelievers are not erased from the face of the earth by tempest, flood or earthquake, but escape from so many

disasters of this kind. Since the coming of our blessed Master, Muhammad, the punishment inflicted on unbelievers has been milder than it was for previous communities. The Exalted One says in the Holy Qur'ān: "I shall not send down upon them a punishment like that of Noah's people, Sālih's people, Lot's people or the people of Shu°ayb, for you are in their midst."

But Allāh would not punish them while you were among them, nor will He punish them while they seek forgiveness. [8:33]

If earlier nations had committed one thousandth part of the evil we have done, they would have suffered instantaneous divine retribution, through drowning, annihilation by fire, or a hail of stones baked in Hell.

All who live and die believing in Muhammad, peace be upon him, will obtain his intercession at the Resurrection and will achieve mercy.

It is beyond the capacity of mere mortals to describe the dignity and majesty of the Holy Messenger; they cannot hope to praise and extol him as he deserves. The true extent of his worth and greatness is known only to Allāh, Exalted is He.

The Holy Prophet is Allāh's slave or bondman and His blessed Messenger. But let us not match our own bondage with his. If we were to place in one scale the acts of worship performed by all the angels, Prophets and righteous people from the venerable Adam till the Day of Resurrection, and if we were to place in the other scale the servitude of the blessed Messenger, the latter would certainly carry the heavier weight. It is actually impertinent to describe our blessed Master as "a man just like ourselves."

He belongs, of course, to the same biological species as ourselves, but in terms of service to Allāh he is unique. After Allāh Himself, the greatest being is Muhammad, peace be upon him. He is the slave, the Messenger and the most dearly Beloved of Allāh. The Lord's Beloved is the Intercessor on the Day of Judgment, the Refuge of the Poor. He is not God, but those who swear homage to him also swear homage to Allāh, Exalted is He. To give obedience to him is to give obedience to Allāh. Exalted is He. In the physical universe he is the last of all Prophets. He is the king and sultan of all Messengers and Prophets. All other Prophets are in the position of ministers to him, for their knowledge, light and perfection are reflections from the Most Noble Messenger and Revered Prophet, Allāh bless him and give him peace.

Allāh declares in the Noble Qur'ān that His own divine Essence and His angels bless His Beloved, and He commands the believers to bless him also. He invited His Beloved to the heavenly Ascension, showed him the marvels attaching to His own Essence and thereby honored those marvels. Out of affection for His Beloved, He made His Sacred Law more gentle. In honor of His blessed Messenger and his Community, He sent down and explained to him the most excellent of all the heavenly scriptures, the Qur'ān, making its rules valid till the Resurrection and presenting it as an inimitable miracle.

Our blessed Master Muhammad is the spiritual director of God's special servants. For he has saved us from every kind of wrongdoing that would cause us to enter Hell and remain there in everlasting torment; and in liberating us from the fire of Hell he has also shown us the ways that lead to Paradise. The blessed Messenger is Allāh's gracious divine favor to us. The Revered Prophet is the source of all goodness, the key to Paradise. He is characterized by all good traits and fine qualities. He is the leader of all devout and righteous people. He is dear to all the angels, Prophets and believers, and in the Hereafter he is greatly beloved of those who dwell in Paradise. He is the foe of all that is wicked and hateful, be it devil or man,

or the devils in man. To believers he is kind and compassionate. Every aspect of human perfection is to be found in his noble person. He is the light of all creatures. His blessed renown will endure till the Resurrection. Many are his noble names and attributes; their great number is indicative of the most noble, most honorable and most perfect nature of his blessed person and body. Our humble pen could never exhaust the record of the merits of the blessed Messenger of Allāh, for the Exalted One has bestowed countless honors upon His Beloved. He says in the Holy Qur'ān: "O My Beloved, great indeed are My grace and bounty upon you." It is certainly sufficient for the Messenger himself to be praised and extolled by his Exalted Lord. May Allāh grant us his intercession in this world and in the Hereafter. Amen.

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TRUE LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP AND THE MEANING OF ENMITY

Our faith will not be perfect unless we love the blessed messenger of the Almighty more than everything we possess. Loving is threefold: to prove our love for someone, we must love the beloved, love what the beloved loves and dislike what the beloved dislikes. Enmity is likewise threefold: it means being an enemy to one's enemy, an enemy to his friend and a friend to his enemy.

If you do not love the friend of a friend, your friendship is incomplete. If you are not hostile to the enemy of your friend, again your friendship is imperfect. This is why the Lord God explains this matter to those He calls "My People of the Book"—the Christians and Jews—in the following noble Verse:

Tell them, My Beloved: ‘If you love God, follow me; Allāh will love you and forgive you your sins. Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful.’ [3:31]

One cannot be hostile to the friend of his friend. In fact, the term friend could not be applied in such a case. For hostility to a friend’s friend is precisely the same as hostility to the friend himself. I need not point out what a great fault it is also to befriend the enemy of one’s friend. Such friendship is inconceivable. For instance, we love our country and those who love it. We have no love for those who do not love our country. This is complete patriotism. If someone says he loves his country, yet does not also love his country’s friends, or likes and assists those who hate and betray his country, that person does not really love his country at all. He may even be a traitor himself. If someone says he loves Allāh and His blessed Messenger, yet does not love those who love them—or loves their enemies —, that person does not really love the Exalted One and His blessed Messenger at all. On the contrary, he is nothing but their enemy and a hypocrite whose inner being is filled with duplicity.

Obviously, a scheme against the believers is a scheme against the Messenger; and a scheme against the Messenger is a scheme against Allāh. But man is incapable of deceiving and cheating the Exalted One. The Lord is immune to such things. Nevertheless, as a Friend to the believers, He treats cheating and deception aimed at them as if they were directed at Himself. And the penalty He imposes for this is surely grave indeed. One must therefore wonder, what mind could conceive of plotting to cheat and deceive, of trying to mislead the Sublime Lord and Creator of the universe, of all worlds, of all creatures, of the first and the last?

In this connection the Chief of the Prophets, the blessed Messenger of the Almighty, said in one of his noble Traditions: “Obey Allāh and obey His Messenger in the same degree, then obey the commands of those who obey Allāh and his Messenger. Whoever obeys the command of those who obey Allāh and His Messenger, obeys me and obeys Allāh. Whoever disobeys the command of those who obey Allāh and me, disobeys me, and disobedience to me is disobedience to Allāh.” This noble Tradition makes plain to us what unity—oneness—entails.

Affection and animosity are meaningful only in relation to Allāh, Exalted is He, and His Messenger Muhammad, God bless him and give him peace. There is no profit in cultivating friendship for ourselves. On the contrary, it is even harmful. Likewise, enmity cultivated toward ourselves will cause us frustration in this world and in the Hereafter.

To befriend people for their beauty is friendship of the flesh. When beauty fades and gives way to ugliness, the lover flees and may even become an enemy. He no longer wants to see the face he used to love. To take another example: a person may win love and friendship because of the high position he holds, but let him get demoted and those who seemed so fond of him will immediately become his enemies. Or let a rich man lose his wealth; those who befriended him for his riches will not longer be around. They too may even become his enemies. For the people we have mentioned were never true friends at all. They were friends of beauty, of wealth and status, or of money.

If someone kills his enemy in holy war (i.e., for the sake of his religion, his country and his Exalted Lord) and if he loses his own life in this cause, he becomes a martyr. If he survives intact, he becomes a hero. If he loses a limb, he is awarded the rank and title of disabled veteran and can go with pride throughout his native land, enjoying respect and attention from all.

Such a person is held in honor and esteem by Allāh, by His blessed Prophet, by the angels and by the believers, even by the army of the foe. Because the struggle he waged was not for himself, but for Allāh and His blessed Messenger and for the things he held sacred. On the other hand, if a man kills for himself (i.e., for drink, gambling or other forbidden things), he earns the revulsion of Allāh and His Messenger and of all his fellow men. Society labels him a criminal, a murderer. He may even be taken to the gallows. It is instructive to compare the depths to which people sink when they love or hate for their own selfish ends, with the heights attained by those who love or hate for the sake of Allāh.

How Imām °Alī Spared The Life Of An Enemy In Battle

Let us add luster to this work by telling an exemplary story concerning the venerable °Alī, the "Gate of Knowledge and Lion of Allāh." At the Battle of the Ditch, the noble Imām °Alī had knocked an enemy soldier to the ground and was raising his sword to kill him, when the unbeliever spat in the blessed face of the Valiant Lion, may Allāh be pleased with him. Imām °Alī at once stood still and refrained from killing his enemy. Hardly able to believe his own eyes, the unbeliever asked: "Why have you spared me, O gracious one?"

To this, the noble °Alī replied: "Your property and your life have become sacrosanct to me. I am not authorized to slay you. I can receive permission to kill only in holy combat, in fighting commanded by Allāh. Just a few moments ago, I had overcome you in battle, knocked you to the ground and was on the point of slaying you. But when you spat in my face, my selfish anger was aroused against you. If I had killed you, I would have slain you not for God's sake but for my own selfish reason; they would then have called me not a champion warrior, but a murderer. When you spat in my face, my selfish passion threatened to overwhelm me, so instead of striking

you with the sword for my own sake I struck my passion for the sake of Allāh, Exalted is He. There you have the reason for your escape."

The unbeliever was left in awe and amazement. This event made him realize that he was a direct witness to the worth and value of being Muslim. As he felt the light of Islam descending into his heart, he was quite unconscious of the tears streaming down from his eyes. How could he be aware of them? … In the space of a few seconds he was being saved from dying as an unbeliever—saved from being an unbeliever at all—and was becoming a Muslim. Moreover, the cause of his conversion, the person standing before him, was none other than the noble Imām °Alī.

Indeed, friendship and affection, as well as enmity, should be in the manner determined by Allāh. That is to say, the object to be ever kept in view is the good pleasure of the Exalted Lord.

Moses, On Him Be Peace, Learns How To Earn The Lord's Approval

One day the Prophet Moses came to Mount Sinai, where he often conversed with the Lord.[2] Allāh addressed the revered Prophet with the words: "Moses, what have you done for Me; what good deed have you performed for My sake?" The venerable Moses replied: "Lord, I have prayed, fasted and given alms." Said the Lord: "Prayer is the mark of religion, fasting is a shield against the Fire; as for giving alms, whose property did you give and to whom did you give it?" The blessed Moses then said: "My Lord, teach me, that I may perform the deed required to earn Your good pleasure." These words now came from on high: "You shall love whatever you love to please Me alone; you shall likewise dislike whatever you dislike only to please Me. This is the action most acceptable in My sight, the only one that will earn My good pleasure."

Bilāl Endures Torture For The Sake Of His Faith; His Deliverance

The following story is particularly illuminating, for Bilāl the Abyssinian is the model of a truly loving person. May Allāh be pleased with him. He was the Negro slave of Umayya ibn Khalaf, one of the most violent of the polytheists.

Bilāl had a heart of pure light, but Umayya ibn Khalaf was an implacable enemy of Islam and of the blessed Prophet. The time came when Bilāl received the blessing of faith. Umayya ibn Khalaf found out about it, so he started taking his slave out into the desert and subjecting him to appalling tortures in the hope of forcing him to abandon the religion of Islam. He would make Bilāl lie down on the blazing hot sand at the time when the sun was at its height, pile heavy stones on top of him and beat him with a spiked club. As if this were not enough, he would not even stop at kicking his feet and beating him to the point of exhaustion, but went on to stick thorns in his blessed body till blood oozed from the wounds.

In spite of all this, the only sounds uttered by the venerable Bilāl were the names of his Loved Ones: “Yā Ahad! Yā Ahmad!”[3] The heart of the venerable Bilāl was so full of their love and affection that the pricking of the thorns and the severity of the beating did nothing to diminish his ardent faith. Quite the contrary: the more diabolical his suffering, the more painful his agony, the greater his love and affection toward God’s Beloved, the stronger his faith in him. Despite such monstrous cruelty and torment, Bilāl never once yielded to Ibn Khalaf, for he had sworn to sacrifice body and soul in the cause of Truth, for the sake of the love of Muhammad, on him be peace.

As for the unbelieving Umayya, every day he would bury Bilāl in the sand, saying: “You black slave, unless you give up this religion of Islam, I am going to treat you to beatings far worse than this; I’ll handle you so roughly that I may end up killing you.” Those cries of “ O One! O Ahmad!” made Umayya ibn Khalaf lose all self-control. But one day those sad, sad cries reached the ears of Abū Bakr the Veracious, who happened to be passing by. Tears sprang to his blessed eyes. This poor wretch was being cruelly tortured by his master, and all because he was uttering the name of God. His only offense was to say that God is One. What a terrible sin! But then he was also calling the blessed Messenger “Ahmad”—what a dreadful crime!

Abū Bakr walked closer to where the sound “Allāh” was coming from. He saw that Umayya’s Negro slave, the believing Bilāl, though worn out by the torture of his heartless master, was consoling himself by persistently pronouncing the noble names of Allāh and His blessed Messenger. “Patience, Bilāl, patience! … ” cried Abū Bakr the Veracious.

Not long afterwards, the venerable Abū Bakr had occasion to pass that way again. The sight of yet another beating session, and the sorrowful groans of “Yā Ahad! Yā Ahmad!” were more than he could bear; he came running to the blessed Messenger and said: “O Messenger of Allāh, Bilāl is consumed with the fire of your love. The polytheists have crucified him, flayed his naked body with thorny branches and left him bleeding all over. Yet while the treacherous Umayya is beating him, the blessed Bilāl says nothing but ‘God is One; the Messenger is Ahmad.’ Submitting to the divine decree, he endures that agony with patience and trust.” Our blessed Master then asked the veracious Abū Bakr what measure might be taken to rescue Bilāl. “O Messenger of Allāh,” he replied, “the solution is to buy Bilāl from Umayya. We must pay his master any price he may ask, for we must save Bilāl at all costs. He is the prisoner of Divine Love, but he is groaning beneath the tyranny of his foe. We are now obliged to rescue him from the tyrant’s cruelty.”

The Holy Messenger then said: “Abū Bakr, act as my agent and pay half the price on my behalf; I shall owe you the money. Go now and purchase Bilāl.” Abū Bakr responded at once: “In this matter I shall spend every penny I can afford, O Messenger of Allāh.” He went straight to Umayya’s house and knocked at his door. As soon as the unbelieving Umayya appeared, the venerable Abū Bakr lashed him with his tongue, saying: ‘You enemy of Allāh, why do you inflict such beatings on this innocent man of God, Bilāl? You enemy of Allāh, what kind of envy and animosity is this? What kind of enmity is this? You are beating a friend of Allāh, yet if you had faith, sincerity and respect even for your own religion your conscience would not let you be so cruel to a person true to his beliefs. You would have some compassion for him. But it is well known that you have no loyalty to your own religion, no faith in your idols.” The cruel Umayya merely replied: “Since you have so much compassion, would you buy this slave if I offered to sell him to you?” Said the venerable Abū Bakr: “ If you will sell me this sultan you disparagingly call a slave, I shall make a thousand prostrations of gratitude to Allāh … ”

Now Abū Bakr had a slave who was very handsome and strong, but whose heart was sour and his disposition mean. He offered Umayya an exchange and brought this slave to show him. It struck Umayya ibn Khalaf as odd that Abū Bakr should be so willing to part with this handsome slave, who was obviously a strong worker, so he demanded a sum of money in addition. The veracious Abū Bakr therefore paid out two hundred pieces of silver along with the handsome slave. Having purchased the venerable Bilāl, he then emancipated him from slavery to please Allāh. As Abū Bakr the Veracious was leaving with Bilāl the Abyssinian, he heard Umayya laughing behind his back as if he thought he had cheated him. He turned and asked: “What reason have you to laugh like that?” but Umayya went on laughing as he said: “You have swapped this fine fellow for an ugly brute who is not worth two cents in my opinion, and you’ve paid me cash into the bargain. I’ve cheated you right down the line; that’s why I’m laughing.”

To this our Master, the most veracious Abū Bakr, replied: “You stupid fool! Just like a baby you have swapped a precious jewel for a couple of walnuts. I do not look at his outward appearance. I look at his essence, at the reality of him. You can see only his shape and color, his external form. But I would gladly give all I possess to ransom Bilāl, for he is in truth a matchless jewel, a priceless gem. His worth and value are known only to Allāh and His blessed Messenger. In short, no amount of money could represent his true price. When you look at it like that, I got Bilāl from you very cheaply. To Allāh be the praise that this honor should fall to my lot.” Crushed by these words, the unbelieving Umayya sighed: “Alas, what have I done? If only I had asked for more money or goods!”

Taking Bilāl by the hand, Abū Bakr led him joyfully into the presence of the blessed Messenger of Allāh. Rescued from the prison of pain, Bilāl the Abysinnian had reached the beauty of God’s Messenger. No words can describe the pure delight in which he was immersed, now that he had attained the radiant presence of the Beloved of the Almighty and won the attention of that Paradise of Majesty, the Bearer of the Message. Our blessed Master smothered Abū Bakr the Veracious with affectionate attention because of the service he had performed. “Abū Bakr,” he said, “let me share in Bilāl’s ransom. I told you I would pay half.” But the venerable Abū Bakr replied: “O Messenger of Allāh, Bilāl and I are slaves at your court. One of your slaves bought another of your slaves and set him free out of longing for your beauty. As for this servant of yours, I have no wish whatever to be liberated from your service.”

* * *

Bilāl was near to breathing his last. His wife and children were weeping at his bedside. The loving Bilāl suddenly opened his eyes. He asked them why they were crying, then added: “Do not weep. Be happy for me. Be glad for my sake, for I am going to be next to my beloved. See, my loved one stands before me. He is calling me. There is my beloved Messenger, peace be upon him, smiling at me and calling me to his side.” With a happy smile he exclaimed: “At your service, Messenger of Allāh!” Still smiling, he then said: I testify that there is no god but Allāh and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.” With these words he surrendered his soul to Allāh.

THE PROPHET, peace be upon him, IS A MERCY NOT ONLY IN THIS WORLD, BUT ALSO IN THE HEREAFTER. HIS INTERCESSION AT THE RESURRECTION.

Any building that is erected is sure to be pulled down in the end. Any individual who enters this world will certainly die one day. The time will come when this world is shorn of all its charms. The sun will be rolled up in the sky, the stars will be scattered, the seas will boil, and the mountains will be fluffed like cotton by the shock of the Resurrection and will float in the air like clouds. Pregnant women will miscarry and nurses will dash their suckling babies to the ground. People will be so confused that they will not know what they are doing. The earth will be violently shaken, flinging out its contents, while the heavens will drip like melting copper. No being will remain except Allāh. The Holy Qur’ān gives an awfully vivid description of these events.

Just as Allāh revives the earth when it is hard and dry, so will He create and fashion a fresh new world from this one. The first to be resurrected from his tomb will be the Most Noble Messenger, on him be peace, who will also be the first to speak on the Day of Resurrection. When terror has caused all

creatures to abandon hope of divine mercy, the blessed Messenger will lovingly flood mankind with happiness—especially his Community.

Our Master, the Mercy to all worlds, tells us in one of his noble Traditions: “As the standard, called the Banner of Praise, is in my hand, it is I who am the most noble of all mankind in the sight of my Lord. Not to boast do I say this. I count the favors and bounties my Lord has granted me. On the Day of Resurrection it is I who am the master of all the descendants of Adam, and the greatest of them. All the Prophets will gather beneath my standard.” He also said: ‘I shall arise from the tomb, mount the wondrous steed Burāq, take my standard in my hand and plant it beneath the Throne. Each of the Prophets will have a banner and they will all plant them under my standard.”

The people gathered for the Resurrection—all mankind, that is—will be bareheaded and barefoot. The sins each one has committed will be made to materialize and each will bear his sin upon his back. They will be starved and thirsty, naked under a sun brought down to just a mile above their heads. No one will utter a sound as they await the divine command of Allāh, Exalted is He. Their sighing and sobbing, moaning and groaning, will reach the Throne. At the moment when all the Prophets and Messengers fall to their knees, each one crying: “Myself, myself!” this command will be given by Allāh: “You who have gathered for the Resurrection, go and seek intercession from Adam. Let him intercede for you.” In response to these words from on high, the people will go to the noble pulpit where Adam sits. They will plead with him: “Our father Adam, you are the choice of Allāh. As our tender father, have compassion on us your children and intercede on our behalf. Let our records be given, our accounts examined and our actions weighed. Let each of us go as soon as possible to his destination.” But Adam will say. “I am not capable of such intercession. It is not within my power. Today is the Day of Resurrection. Today my Lord is very wroth. Never before has He been so angry. He must not get angrier still. I am too fearful of my Lord’s wrath to be able to

intercede for you. Today I am thinking only of myself. You had better go to Noah, on him be peace. He is the Master of Resolve and he will recognize your need. Perhaps he will make intercession."

The people will then go to Noah and beg his intercession, but he will also excuse himself with this explanation: "I did not ask God's pardon for my own unbelieving son, so I too am in fear for my own sake. I am not qualified to intercede." He will refer them to Abraham, on him be peace, saying: "Abraham is God's Intimate Friend, the ancestor of Muhammad, peace be upon him. Perhaps he will make intercession." But when they turn to Abraham they will find him also crying: "Myself, myself!" He will direct them to Moses, God's Interlocutor, on him be peace.

The blessed Moses will make his apologies too, declaring: "I do not possess this power of intercession." Crying "Myself, myself!" he will send the people on to Jesus, peace be upon him, saying: "Jesus is the Spirit of God; go and ask him to intercede." But they will find the blessed Jesus extremely afraid. "O Jesus," they will plead, "you are the Spirit of God; make intercession for us!" But Jesus will say: "Today I dare not offer my intercession, for my people have taken me to be their Lord and have worshipped me. Moreover, they have called me the son of God, adoring me and putting me in partnership with the Exalted One. As I ponder these things, I am anxious about my own fate. All I can think of today is myself." With this excuse he will say: "O people gathered for the Resurrection, go to the Lord's Beloved, the blessed Muhammad, the Mercy to All Worlds, the Chief of the Universe. For while I was still in the lower world I gave the good tidings that his Primal Light and Final Mission would follow after me. He alone is authorized for intercession, since Allāh has promised to grant him any favor until he is content. Go to him at once."

When the people come to our Master Muhammad—the Chief of the Prophets, Sovereign of the Two Worlds, Intercessor for Men and Jinn, the Grandfather of Hasan and Husayn—they will see him seated upon a noble pulpit, beautifully adorned and elevated to a great height above the pulpits of the other Prophets. They will see a smile upon his blessed and noble countenance, lovelier than Paradise itself. When they behold this lofty station, the infidels who did not believe in him in this world will regret a thousand times their failure to believe in him then. They will express their remorse with the cry: “Oh, if only we had believed in the noble Intercessor while we were still in the lower world. If only we had embraced Islam, committing our lives and our wealth to his cause.” But their regret will be of no avail. Seeing our blessed Prophet in this condition, the people will say: “Mercy, O Messenger of Allāh! O Revered Prophet, make intercession for us!”

The Chief of chiefs and Intercessor of the Place of Resurrection will answer: “Indeed, it is only I who am qualified for this intercession. My Lord has promised this intercession to me.” Then he will seek permission for it from his Lord, and the Lord will graciously say to His Most Noble Messenger: “O My Beloved, make your intercession. I have permitted you to intercede.” The blessed Messenger will fall in prostration out of gratitude for this divine favor. In this prostration he will glorify the Exalted One as he never glorified him before. While he is hymning these praises, Allāh will graciously say: “O Messenger, raise your blessed head from prostration! Ask whatever it is that you desire, for your intercession has been accepted, your request has been granted.” Our noble Master will then make the plea: “O my Lord, let my Fātima, my Hasan, my Husayn and the people of my household be the ransom for my Community. Only my Community, my Community!” (Meaning: “Grant salvation to my Community, O my Lord!”)

In short, on the Day of Resurrection it is our blessed Master, the Glory of the Universe, who—before all the Prophets—has the competence to make intercession[4] for his Community and to obtain their salvation. Allāh bless

him and give him peace. It is now clear to us that it is only our Master, the Lord's Beloved, God bless him and give him peace, who has been sent as a mercy to this world and the Hereafter. He has given us the good tidings of Paradise and the Beauty of Allāh, informed us of the bounties of Paradise, taught us the meaning of good and evil, inspired in believers the fear of divine punishment, been a witness to believers and unbelievers alike, testified to the Unity of God and completed his call to Truth by leave of Allāh, Exalted is He. Is it not our duty to love—more than we love anything—our Master Muhammad, God bless him and give him peace, who has become a light for us in the darkness and shown us the ways of Truth, who is so supremely Tender, Compassionate, Kind and a Mercy to All Worlds? Of course it is our duty. Let us love him more than anything, so that our faith may come to perfection. Let us be saved from the fire, from punishment in this world and the Hereafter. Let us find the bounties of Paradise. Let us have the possibility of beholding the Beauty of God. For the lover is together with the one he loves. O my Lord, for the sake of the Messenger of men and jinn, make us love Your Beloved Muhammad, blessings and peace be upon him. Do not separate us from him.

A Simple Tribesman Asks About The Resurrection and Learns The Value of Love For Allāh

The following story is beautifully narrated by Anas ibn Mālik, may Allāh be pleased with him:

"One day we were sitting in the presence of the Messenger. Along came an unsophisticated Arab tribesman, who put this question to the Messenger of Allāh: 'O Messenger of Allāh, when will the Resurrection start?' Without answering the man, our Master got up to pray. Then, when he had finished his prayer, he turned to us and said: 'Who is the one who asked that question?' Up got the tribesman, saying: 'It was I, O Messenger of

Allāh.’—‘O tribesman, you ask about the Resurrection. That is a matter predetermined and it will certainly come to pass. But what have you prepared against that day?’

“Hearing this reply, the tribesman said: ‘By God, I don’t have a lot of worship and obedience to my credit. Although I do perform my five daily prayers and keep the fast one month of the year, I cannot claim any other righteous deeds. But I do love Allāh and yourself very much.’ At this, our Master the Chief of the Universe said: ‘O tribesman, a person is together with the one he loves, and you are together with those you love.’ ”

Anas ibn Mālik adds: “We were as delighted by this conversation as we had been on our entering Islam. For we had always shared the same anxiety. We were worried by the thought that, when the Resurrection came, the Glory of the Universe would attain such high stations that we could not come near him. We now realized that togetherness lay through much affection, not through a lot of worship.”

If you also love Allāh and His Messenger, you will be with him in the Hereafter. But if your affection is for the enemy of the Messenger, you will be resurrected with his enemy, far from the Messenger. For a person is together with the one he loves.

O my Lord, for the sake of the Throne and the Seat; for the sake of the Most Great Name and the light of the Qur’ān; for the sake of the secret of °Imran and the mystery of the Criterion; for the sake of the beauty of the face of Joseph of Canaan; for the sake of the blood spilled in the cause of Truth; for the sake of the eye that saw You on the Ascension; for the sake of Your gracious words to Your Messenger; for the sake of the veracity of Abū Bakr and the justice of °Umar; for the sake of the merit of ºUthmān and °Alī; for

the sake of Hasan the Elect and Husayn of Karbalā’; for the sake of the purity of the People of your House; for the sake of the martyr George; for the sake of Ghawth of Gaylān; for the sake of the doctrine of Nu°mān; for the sake of the Gospel and Torah, Psalms and Qur’ān, make us companions of Your Beloved, make us intimates of the sufferers in their suffering; acquaint our souls with the Soul-of-Muhammad, do not part us from him, resurrect us with those You love, confirm us in Your service, let us be among those who worship You. Make us worshippers with those who worship You. Graciously favor those who kindly follow our discourse, and make faith pleasant in their hearts. Have mercy on our dead, and beautify those of us still living with Your affection. Preserve our country from evil, and abase our foes. Make our end and destination good; grant that we breathe our last breath in faith. Accept our prayers and rejoice our hearts. Amen, for the sake of the Chief of the Messengers. All praise belongs to Allāh, Lord of All Worlds.

NOTES

[1]Because of these five prostrations, five daily prayers became obligatory for the Messenger and his Community.

[2]Hence his title, Kalīmu-llāh: “God’s Interlocutor.”

[3]“O One! O Ahmad!” In Arabic there is a difference of just one letter between the Divine Name AHAD (One) and the Prophet’s name AHMAD. The additional ‘M’ in the latter is the initial of Muhammad—on him be peace.

[4]Our blessed Master will make intercession seven times in all.

THE FIFTH DISCOURSE

The Duties of Children

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Worship Allāh and set nothing in partnership with Him. To both parents show kindness … [4:36].

Your Lord has decreed that you shall worship none but Him, and show kindness to your parents; if one or both of them attain old age with you, never say to them ‘Ough!’ nor scold them. Speak to them graciously, and lower for them the wing of humbleness, for mercy’s sake, and say: ‘My Lord, have mercy on them, as they raised me up when I was small.’ [17:23-24].

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QUR’ĀNIC INJUNCTIONS

No benefit accrues to Allāh, even if all mankind obey the Lord’s commandments; nor could it harm Him in the least if all men did what He told them not to do. Whatever anyone does, he does it for his own sake. These commands and prohibitions are divine favors bestowed upon us.

If the All-Glorious One had left us to our own devices, we would have been cannibals—even lower than the beasts. We would have mated incestuously. Where would we have learned cleanliness, tenderness, mercy, respect for elders, filial piety? How could we have applied the rule of law? How could we have learned to help the weak and the oppressed, and to treat them kindly? Whose mind would have conceived the idea of compassion for the poor and needy, or of helping dumb animals and giving them their due?

Would it have been an easy matter to find Allāh and come to know Him? Would justice, equality and freedom have been typical of humanity?

You may say that mankind had begun to practice these good qualities even in ancient times, when societies, nations and communities first appeared. Such is indeed the case, but then the blessed Prophets acted as intermediaries between God and His servants from the very origins of humankind. These Messengers brought divinely inspired scriptures, and some of their precepts were put into practice, while other rules were not observed at all. Supposedly civilized nations may profess an official religion, claim to follow a Prophet, and even stamp “God with us” on their coinage, yet they despise people who happen to have black skin, regard them as inferior and deny them their rights.

Allāh graciously informs us that we are all one. If we know the Creator, we gladly accept all creation for His sake. Each of us human beings came into existence through the union of a man and a woman. As the All-Glorious One tells us:

Furthermore, if anyone should worship his Lord and then make a supplication, praising Allāh and His blessed Messenger, but without praying for his mother and father, and without asking divine forgiveness for them, his supplication will not even reach the All-Glorious One. In all His revealed Books, namely the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel and the Qur’ān, the Lord had ordained obedience and kind ness to parents, declaring to all His Prophets: “My divine approval is gained by winning the approval of parents. Likewise, My wrath is incurred by making them angry.”

And We have charged man concerning his parents—his mother bore him in weakness, and his weaning was in two years—‘Be thankful to Me, and to

your parents; to Me is the homecoming.’ [31:14].

Thus Allāh links gratitude to parents, to mother and father, with the gratitude due to Himself. Anyone who offers thanks, yet is not grateful to his parents, has not really thanked at all. As our blessed Prophet said: “If anyone pleases his parents, my Lord is certainly pleased with him. If anyone offends his parents, the Creator certainly takes offense. Allāh’s approval is linked to that of one’s parents. If they are pleased, Allāh is pleased also. If they are offended, Allāh is offended too.”

The Prophet Moses and the Butcher’s Guest

The blessed Prophet Moses was one day conversing with his Lord upon Mount Sinai. “O Moses,” said the Exalted One, “would you like me to introduce you—here in this world—to the companion you will have in Paradise?”

The Prophet Moses said: “I would indeed, O Lord.” so the Lord told him: “Go to such-and-such city, to a certain quarter, where there lives a butcher called so-and-so. That butcher is to be with you in Paradise. He has many faults, but because of the way he served his mother, I accepted the prayer she made on his behalf. Through his mother’s prayer, he has attained the rank of being your companion in Paradise.”

The blessed Moses went to that city and found the butcher of whom he had been told. Hiding his identity, he said he was a traveler for the sake of Allāh. He requested hospitality for one night, and the butcher agreed. Toward evening, the latter shouldered his basket, gathered provisions for

the night, then took the traveler home with him. He installed him in the cleanest room, saying: “Welcome, guest of Allāh, welcome!” Then he added: “Pray excuse me for a while.

I must first attend to an earlier guest.” He lowered from the ceiling a hammock in which lay a helpless old woman, too weak to sit up. He cleaned her as if she were a baby, fed her with some of the food he had brought, kissed her, nuzzled her hair, then laid her down again. The old lady murmured something or other, to which the butcher said “Amen.” The Prophet Moses could not understand a word, for the old woman’s voice was almost inaudible.

After all this, the butcher came and occupied himself with serving his new guest. The latter asked: “Who is this old lady?” and the butcher replied: “She is my mother, the crown of my head, the consolation of my heart. She is my guest, whom I delight in waiting upon.” The blessed Moses said: “She spoke, but I could not catch her words. Was it a prayer she was making?” “Yes,” said the butcher, “she prayed, as every mother does for her children; for something that will never be, of course, but a mother has such hopes for her children.”—“What was it she prayed for?”—“Oh, something impossible. I am a butcher, a common sinner, yet every day she prays: ‘For my sake, son, may Allāh make you the companion in Paradise of the blessed Moses.’ How could this be? Who is the Prophet Moses, and who am I?”

“Hear the good news, brother butcher,” the blessed Moses now exclaimed. “Your mother’s prayer has been accepted. I am the Prophet Moses, and you are to be my companion in Paradise!”

Saint Uways Obeys His Mother’s Instructions to the Letter

The venerable Uways al-Qarāni once owned the cloak of the noble Messenger, which is now among the sacred treasures preserved in Istanbul. He reached his exalted spiritual rank by virtue of obedience to his mother.

As his surname indicates, Uways was from the village of Qaran, in the Yemen. He had asked his mother's permission to visit Allāh's Messenger, and she said: "You have my permission to go, see him once, and come straight back. If the Messenger is at home, you may meet with him; if not, come straight back here." Uways made a journey of three months on foot, from the Yemen to Medina. He finally reached the Messenger's apartment, where his knock was answered by the venerable °Ā'isha, wife of the Chosen Prophet and Mother of the Believers. "Allāh's Messenger is not at home," she told him. "You will find him in the mosque."

Keeping his promise to his mother, Uways replied: "Please convey my salutations to the blessed Messenger. Kindly inform him that Uways came from the Yemen, did not find him at home, and is returning to the Yemen, since he does not have permission from his mother to meet him in the mosque."

When the blessed Messenger came home from the mosque, he found the radiance of Uways in his house. The venerable °Ā'isha told him what had happened, and conveyed Uways's salutations. Looking toward the Yemen, the blessed Prophet said: "The fragrance of our friend is reaching us." The noble Companions asked: "If Uways is your friend, why did he not stay to see you?" but the blessed Messenger replied: "He is attending to his mother's service."

Our Master let it be known that he would never be able to meet Uways in this world. He said: “Uways will come back to Medina one day, but he will fail to find me, for I shall then be united with my Lord.” He charged that when Uways came back to Medina he was to be given his cloak, and asked to pray for the Community of Muhammad. He also mentioned that Uways bore a mark of light on one of his hands.

In the time of the Caliphate of °Umar, a number of Yemenis visited Medina, and the venerable °Umar and °Alī approached them with the question: “Is there among you a saint called Uways, from the village of Qaran?” The Yemenis knew of no such saint in their midst, but they did point out a certain camelherd from that village, who seldom mixed with other people, preferring to spend his time in worship, alone among the camels. The noble °Umar and °Alī then approached the venerable Uways, saluted him, conveyed the greetings of the Messenger, and presented him with his blessed cloak. But he was reluctant to accept. “Surely there is some mistake!” he exclaimed, in his desire to hide himself. Seeing the light upon his hand, however, they cried: “You are the saint described to us by Allāh’s Messenger, for he told us about the light on your hand.” They also reported to him the wish of the blessed Messenger that he should pray for the Community of Muhammad.

Uways thereupon took the Messenger’s cloak and rubbed it over his face and eyes. Then he asked to be left alone. When the noble pair—°Umar, the Commander of the Believers, and °Alī, the Cupbearer of the Water of Paradise—had withdrawn, Uways held the cloak and began to pray: “O Lord, this cloak is the cloak of Your beloved Messenger. He has presented it to me, but I refuse to wear it unless You pardon the Community of Muhammad.” He then repeated his prayer in exactly the same words. When the venerable ºUmar and ºAlī came beside him as he was about to repeat his prayer a third time, Uways cried: “Oh, you come too soon! Upon my first supplication, Allāh granted me forgiveness for one third of the Community; on my second entreaty, He forgave two-thirds of the Community; in my

third request I was pleading for pardon for the entire Community of Muhammad—then you came along!”

As with people in every age, the Yemenis were unaware of the presence in their midst of such a saint, whose prayers were accepted. They imagined him to be an ordinary camelherd. The venerable Uways has become the archetype of such Intimates of Allāh, who remain incognito and hide themselves away from other people.

Believers who serve and obey their mothers, and treat them kindly, will be resurrected together with the Prophet Moses and Saint Uways. Those who are good to their parents will be happy in this world and the Hereafter.

The Mother’s Due is Three Time Greater Than the Father’s

One day, a noble Companion asked: “O Messenger of Allāh, who has the greater right over children, the mother or the father?” The Chief of the Two Worlds vouchsafed this reply: “The mother’s right is greater than the father’s.” The question was repeated three times, and each time the reply was the same. Only at the fourth asking did the answer change to: “The father’s right is greater.”

The Companion then enquired: “O Messenger of Allāh, why do you give the mother three rights to the father’s one?” To this he replied: “Your mother carried you for nine months and ten days in her womb, then gave you birth. After that she gave up her sleep for you, suckled you, carried you in her arms for three years, and cleaned up your mess. For seven years she carried you on her back. She did your laundry. She cooked and served your

food for eighteen years. When you were forty, fifty, sixty, she still followed your progress with interest. As for your father, he sowed you in your mother’s womb, provided your food and made sure you had clothes to wear. Can this be com pared with your mother’s role?”

The Companion then went on to ask: “Well, O Messenger of Allāh, I wonder if I could ever repay my mother for all the help and service, however much I might do for her?” The Messenger replied: “You could not repay so much as one night’s due!”—“But suppose I carry my mother on my back for years, clean up after her, cook for her and feed her. Suppose I attend to those same services as long as she may live?”—“There will still be this difference between you: your mother looked out for you to live, while you are waiting for her to die.”

THE MEANING OF “MOTHER”

A mother means pure tenderness. A mother means the source of compassion. A mother means loyalty and hospitality. How can she be paid her due? A man dies once, but a mother dies each time she gives birth. The venerable °Alī tells us that giving birth is as painful as death. Is it not she who shields you from all misfortune when you are helpless? Is it not she who spends long sleepless nights for your sake? Is it not she who breaks her rest at least three or four times to feed you at her breast? Is it not she who does without clothes to clothe you, who conceals from you the pains she has to bear? Is it not she who quickly hides her tears with a smile, lest her children notice and feel sad? Is it not she who cannot bear to wake her children when they are sleeping, who does not see their faults, or does not draw attention to them when she does see them, who promptly pardons her children for the pain they cause? How could you repay what you owe your mother? Is it possible to do so? Mother, such is mother. A partner in our grief, a balm to our wounds …

Is it not she who is ready to sacrifice her very life to save her children? …

A Mother Still Loves her Most Unworthy Son

There was once a good-for-nothing, disobedient boy, whose father had died and who used to take and spend whatever his mother possessed. There was no end to the pain and suffering he caused his mother to keep himself in funds. He sold off the very clothes from her back. He would let her want for a crust of bread. One day as usual he pestered his mother to give him money. Although the poor woman swore that she had none, the wicked boy drew his knife and struck her down in a pool of blood. “You have it,” he cried, “but you won’t give it to me. I am going to kill you.” As she lay there bleeding, the unfortunate woman looked tenderly at her son and said: “Quick, run away from here. Oh dear, the police will lock you up if they catch you.” Even in that state of affairs, she could not bear to see him thrown in jail, so she sent her son away. That is a mother for you. How could you pay a mother her due?

At the slightest pain we call out “Mother!” Even in name she shares whatever befalls us.

That is why Allāh, Glorified is He, ordains kindness and obedience to parents next only to worship of Him.

Saint Hasan al-Basrī Meets a Pilgrim and his Mother

One day, as he was circumambulating the Ka°ba in Mecca, the venerable Hasan al-Basrī[1] encountered a young man carrying a basket on his back. He asked him what the basket contained. “I am carrying my mother in it,” said the youth, who went on to explain: “We are poor folk. For years my mother has wanted to visit the Ka°ba, but we could not afford the expense of the journey. I was well aware of my mother’s desire. She had grown too old to travel, but she always spoke lovingly of the Ka°ba, and whenever she thought about it her eyes would fill with tears. I could not bear to see my mother in such a state, so I put her on my back inside this basket and brought her all the way from our house in Syria. Now, here we are making the circuit of the Ka°ba! They say the rights of parents are great indeed. I wonder, O Imām, if I shall be able to repay my mother’s due by what I have done for her?” But the venerable Hasan al-Basrī replied: “Even if you were capable of doing it seventy times over, you could never compensate your mother for one kick you gave her when you were inside her womb!”

Imām Qushayrī is Rewarded for his Tenderness Toward his Mother

Imām Qushayrī says: “My father died when I was a boy. My fellows were all going abroad to pursue their studies, so I asked my mother’s permission to do the same. “My dear mother,” said I, “all my friends are going away to study. Please allow me to join them. Let me study, so that I do not remain in ignorance.” When she heard these words, my mother wept, saying: “My son, I have no one but you to open the door of my house. Do not leave me all alone in this lower world.” Nevertheless, I pleaded with her to give her consent for God’s sake, insisting on the need I felt to study and on the evil of ignorance, until I obtained her reluctant agreement and set off with my companions. Outside the town, I stopped in a secluded spot to relieve myself. Finding that I had soiled my clothes in the process, I told my friends to go on ahead. I would go back home to change, and would catch up with them later. So they set off without me, while I returned home. As I reached our house I heard my mother weeping loudly, crying that she could not bear being separated from me. I went inside and told her not to grieve,

as I was going to give up the idea of studying, but she said: “No, my son, I cannot take such a responsibility upon myself. You go and study. I am a mother, what can I do but weep and pray? Never mind my tears, they cool the fire of longing for you that burns in my breast. Go along now; get on with your studies.” In spite of this, however, I stuck to my decision not to go after all, and I made her feel better by saying: “Wipe away those tears, my poor old mother!” Then she said a prayer for me: “May Allāh grant you His knowledge. Just as you did not leave me lonely, may He not desert you in this world or the Hereafter.” Her heart was happy.

The next day a person with a shining face knocked at our door. I opened it for him, and asked him what he wanted. He told me he was looking for me. When I enquired who was honoring me so, he said: “Because you did not leave your mother on her own to burn in the fire of yearning, Allāh has sent His servant Khidr to teach and instruct you.” I realized that this was Khidr, on him be peace, who had come to me. I kissed his hand, and for three years I studied all branches of knowledge with him. By the time I was ready to graduate, he had composed one thousand books. Putting in a box all the books he had made me read, he told me to throw them into the River Oxus, which flowed through our country. I took the books, but could not bring myself to throw them in the river, so I found a place to hide them. When I got home he asked me what I had done with the books, and when I said I had thrown them in the river he asked: “What did you see?” I said I had not seen anything. “Then you cannot have thrown the books in the river,” said he. “Go and do it now.” Once again I felt incapable of throwing them in the river so I changed their hiding place. When I got home he again asked what I had seen while throwing the books in the river. “I saw nothing.”—“You naughty boy, you still cannot have thrown them into the river.” I went back for the third time. This time I did throw the box of books in the river and, when I did so, two hands appeared from the water, caught the box and sank out of sight. Back home, I told the venerable Khidr what I had seen. “Yes,” said he, “you really must have thrown the box into the river this time.” I asked him to explain what all this meant and he explained: “As the

Resurrection approaches, the venerable Jesus will descend to earth and will use these books, as a member of the Community of Muhammad."

Pilgrimage is one of the five basic duties of Islam. Yet they say that even the performance of Pilgrimage is unacceptable if done without one's mother's approval. Be obedient to your parents and earn God's good pleasure. Your mother and father are your honored guests. You will lose them one day, and be left all alone in the world. You will never find a friend and helper like your mother. For of all those who seem to be your friends, the most loyal is your mother. Other friends may let you down.

Your mother is your only true friend, all the rest are friends of your money, rank, beauty, youth or health. Should you become bankrupt, ugly, old or sick, or be put in prison, your one real friend will be your mother.

A Young Man Learns that Obedience to One's Mother Is More Meritorious Than Performing the Pilgrimage

A certain young man intended to go on Pilgrimage, so he asked his mother's permission. But she did not approve. "My son," she said, "you are the only one I have. Who will look after me if you go on Pilgrimage? Besides, I could not bear to miss you." Ignoring her words, the son prepared to ride. Seeing that her boy was quite adamant, the woman got provisions ready for him and said farewell. As she saw him off, she prayed: "O Lord, send my child back to me safe and sound. He took no notice of me, but he is young. Pardon him, and protect him from accidents and trouble." As the young man was traveling with the Pilgrim caravan, someone came alongside him and said: "Let us be friends. I know a short cut. If we go that way we shall reach the Ka°ba a week ahead of this caravan." He persuaded the boy and they left the caravan. Soon they came to a lonely wood. In that

frightful valley, with not a soul in sight, the man drew his sword and said: “Quick, out with your money!” He also told the boy to look into a ditch that lay in front of them. The boy looked, and in that ditch he saw that there were many human skeletons. “Spare my life,” he cried, “I am a mother’s son. Take my money, but send me back to my mother.” The robber said: “I am under oath to kill the people I rob. Quick, undress and produce your money.” As the robber bore down on him, the young man said: “Please let me just perform a short ritual prayer.” The robber agreed to this request, saying: “Be quick, let’s see you do your prayer.” The youth took his ablution and proceeded to perform his prayer. When he came to put his face to the ground in prostration, he began to make supplication, weeping as he begged: “O Lord, come to my aid, bring some relief. You know, O Lord, that I am a mother’s son. Do not burn my mother in the fire of separation and yearning. Have compassion for my mother.” As he made this plea, tears streaming from his eyes, he heard a voice in his ear, saying: “At your service.” The voice came even closer. When the boy heard this voice, water was sprinkled on his burning heart. “Help, O God,” said he. The voice drew nearer. When the young man said: “O God, help, O God,” the voice reached his side. As he raised his head from prostration, he saw a majestic figure standing over him, with a lance in his hand. “Save me from this cruel man,” cried the youth, “he wants to kill me and leave my mother to burn with sorrow.” That honorable person immediately thrust his pike at the robber and finished him off. “Who are you?” asked the youth, “You have rescued me from that cruel man.”—“I am an angel from the seventh sphere of heaven. Take this money the robber has here; Allāh has made it yours. Go home to your mother and give up making the Pilgrimage.” So saying, he disappeared. The young man took as much money as he could carry and went back to his own land. He was reunited with his mother. He told her his adventure and they both thanked Allāh. The youth had learned that to serve one’s mother is more meritorious than making Pilgrimage.

The Blessed Prophet Reconciles an Aged Father and His Son

A man once came to the blessed Messenger, complaining that his father had spent all his money without asking his permission. Our Master called the man's father into his presence. When this very aged person arrived, leaning on his staff, he asked him: "Do you take your son's money without his permission?" The old man realized that his son had been complaining about him. "O Prophet of Allāh," he cried, "once I was strong, while my son was weak; I was rich, while he was poor; therefore I did not hoard my money, but fed him when I did not eat. Now I have grown old and weak, while my son has grown strong; I have become poor, while he has become rich. He began to hide his money from me. I used to set his food in front of him, but he keeps his food to himself. I would never have treated him as he treats me. If I were as strong as I used to be, I would not grudge him my money." At this, the blessed eyes of the Messenger brimmed with tears that fell like pearls upon his noble beard. "All right, father," he said, "Go and spend as much of your son's money as you wish; that money is yours." The son also accepted this verdict.

Respect For One's Father's Friend

The venerable Hasan met an Arab tribesman one day as he was riding in the desert. Dismounting from his camel, he made the Arab ride in his place; he also took the sunshade from his own head and made the tribesman wear it. Then he asked after the man's health. The Imām's companions wondered: "Why do you show such respect to a simple Arab? He is a peasant, while you are a prince—son of the venerable Fātima and grandson of the Chief of Both Worlds!" But the Imām replied: "This tribesman is a friend of my father °Alī. By paying him this respect, I discharge the respect I owe to my father."

A Water-Carrier Of Samarqand Fulfills His Promise To His Parents

In the City of Samarqand there once lived a water-carrier. This person had made a vow: what he earned on a Friday he would give to the poor, for the sake of the souls of his mother and father. Furthermore, he would pray for their forgiveness after each of the five times for daily worship. For a long while he honored this commitment, but one Friday he earned no money, so of course he could give nothing to the poor. He went and asked a wise man what he ought to do. Said the wise man: “My son, gather up the skins of melons and watermelons. Give them to the animals, then offer the spiritual re ward for your action to your mother and father. That promise of yours will thus be fulfilled.” The water-carrier did as the wise man had told him. That very night he saw his mother and father in a dream. “Allāh be pleased with you!” they cried. “You used to send us a present every Friday, and now this Friday night we received as a divine gift the melons and watermelons of Paradise.”

OUR CONDUCT AFFECTS THE SOULS OF OUR DEPARTED PARENTS

By divine leave, the souls of the dead come every Friday night to the doors of their houses, speaking thus: “My son, my daughter, my brother, or my spouse, you are sitting in the homes we have left, eating all sorts of good food. We are in the grave, hungry, thirsty and in darkness. You never bless our memory, never give alms for our souls’ sake. Soon you too will be like us. Give alms for us!” If they are remembered with blessings and alms, they go back gladly, saying: “You have not forgotten us; may Allāh be satisfied with you.” But if their memory is not being blessed they go off saying: “You have let us down; may Allāh disappoint you too.”

Those who have died are kept informed of the condition and behavior of their bereaved offspring and spouses. They rejoice or feel pain in the Other World, according to the good or bad deeds of the latter. However, since they do not possess the powers they had when alive to prevent those they have left behind from committing evil, or to oblige them to perform good deeds, they can only hope for their favors. They pray for those who act kindly and do good works. They feel sorrow and pain for those who do bad things, committing acts that may provoke Allāh's anger. Thus they regret having left behind good-for-nothing children and they curse them. A mother and father who see that their children are going wrong, yet although they realize it are unable to save them from these bad ways, will surely suffer in this life; in the Hereafter, however, this suffering and agony will be much, much more intense. The angels will show such people their children's evil deeds and torment them with the words: "Just look at the conduct of the children you have left behind you!" On the other hand they will be kind and gentle to parents whose children behave well. Such mothers and fathers will enjoy the sight of their children's good conduct.

On his heavenly Ascension, our blessed Master noticed Adam looking to his right and rejoicing, then looking to his left and grieving. The blessed Gabriel explained the meaning of this, saying: "O Messenger of Allāh, he looks to his left, sees the unbelievers and sinners among his progeny, and is sad. He looks to his right, sees his believing and righteous descendants, rejoices and is glad."

From this it is understood that we shall be pleased or sorry not only in this life, but in the Hereafter also, about the deeds—good or bad—of the children we have left or shall leave in the world. We must therefore bring up our children in faith, sincerity and worship. It is we who are answerable, in this world and the Hereafter, for the good and the evil they will do. Children who neither bless their parents' memory, nor cause it to be blessed, are deserving of their dead parents' curse, and they will encounter anathema from them or from Allāh. When they have completed this brief

human life and have fallen sooner or later into the dread hand of death, as they are parted from their goods and possessions and enter the cesspit which is their grave, the children—who will indubitably meet the same end—should not forget this: in the hope of receiving blessings from their children whom they have left there, tearful and sad, they will be coming to the doors of their houses on Friday nights, begging for pity. But they will turn away saddened and grieved at not being treated kindly, and they will curse their children who neither bless their memory nor cause it to be blessed.

O people of faith, let us bless our parents' memory. Let us not turn them away empty-handed. Let us not make them sad and unhappy. Let us please them with the good we have done and shall do, and let us make their spirits glad. Respect for the dead is a quality peculiar to mankind. Animals do not possess this attribute. Let us reflect and bear in mind that, in the very near future, we too shall taste death. We too, just like our parents, shall retire from this transitory world. If we bless their memory, our own children will do the same for us. Man reaps as he sows.

The noble Messenger once asked the blessed Gabriel: "After my time on earth, will you ever descend to this world again?" Gabriel replied: "Yes, I shall come down ten more times, and on each of those ten trips I shall remove one of the attributes proper to mankind. One of these will be obedience and kindness to parents." It seems that rebellion against parents will be one of the signs that the Resurrection is at hand.

A Man Thinks Better of Forsaking His Aged Father

There was once a man whose father was an aged invalid. The man's wife was forever nagging him: "I am sick of the sight of your father. You'll have

to choose between us. If you prefer the old man, I'll be on my way." The poor husband would ask her imploringly: "What am I to do? If I don't look after my own father, who else is going to care for him?"

The woman was adamant. After giving the matter deep thought, the man decided to take his father to the mountains and leave him there. He got the cart ready, as if he intended to take his little boy for a trip, then he called to his old father: "I'm going to the mountains with the little fellow. Why don't you come along for the ride? The air will do you good."

The three of them set off for the mountains together. Oblivious of what was in store for him, the old man chatted with his grandson and shared the joy-ride with him. At length they reached a lonely forest. The man spread bedding on the ground, made his father lie down, and set a little food and water beside him. "Just lie there, father," he said, "while we go and chop some firewood."

Not realizing what had happened to him, the poor old grandfather was left behind in bewilderment. But when several hours had gone by with no one coming to look for him, he grasped the reason why he had been abandoned. His eyes filled with tears, but to what avail? What could a wretched old man do?

Meanwhile, his son and grandson were driving back to the village, leaving the old fellow to await his final meeting with destiny. "Why did we leave my Granddad in that lonely place?" asked the boy. "Aren't we going back to fetch him?" The man replied: "He has grown old. Let him stay there now." This answer did not satisfy the innocent child. "But why?" he asked, then he cried: "I want my Granddad!" His father insisted: "He's too old, I tell you … He has to stay there." But the child finally brought him to his

senses with these words: “Very well, when I grow up, you will be old and sickly like my Granddad. When that time comes, shall I leave you in the mountains like you left my Granddad?”

Realizing now what a great sin he had committed, the man went back weeping. Finding his old father in the place where he had abandoned him, he fell at his feet. The old man caressed his son’s head, saying: “Don’t cry, my son. I did not leave my father in the mountains, so why should Allāh make you leave me here?”

Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and all the believers on the Day of Reckoning!

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and praise be to Allāh, Lord of All the Worlds.

NOTES

[1] A great spiritual guide and a contemporary of the venerable °Alī. All lines of the Sufi path are traced through him.

THE SIXTH DISCOURSE

Salvation from the Fire of Hell

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

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May Allāh deliver us from the pain of death, the terrors of the tomb, and the fire of Hell. May He graciously number us among those who enter Paradise, and who behold His Countenance therein. May He acquaint our spirits with the Spirit of Muhammad. With the light of the Qur'ān and Divine Unity may He gladden our sad hearts, ruined by love of this world …

And each soul is paid in full for what it has done; He is best aware of what they do. [39:70].

And those who disbelieve are driven into Hell in companies until, when they reach it and its gates are opened, and its keepers say: 'Did not Messengers come to you from among yourselves, reciting to you the signs of your Lord and warning you of the encounter of this day of yours?' they say: 'Indeed; but the word of doom is realized against the unbelievers.' [39:71].

It will be said: 'Enter the gates of Hell, to dwell there forever.' How evil the lodging of the arrogant! [39:72].

CONDITIONS IN THE HEREAFTER FORESHADOWED IN THIS WORLD

The following discourse is addressed to those who love the Lord's Beloved more than health or wealth, more than parents or children. It is addressed to those who give their hearts to the Chosen Prophet, the Bliss of the Believer, the Unbeliever's Regret, the Refuge of the Wayfarer, the Intercessor, the

Compassionate, the Kind, the Generous, the Warner, the Bringer of Good Tidings, the Pious.

Just as every state, nation and government has its laws and regulations, there is also a system of law and order proper to Allāh, our Creator, Sustainer and Benefactor, Lord of this entire universe. Just as the state will punish those who break the nation's laws, so does a dreadful penalty await those who violate His regulations; they are punished in the divine penitentiary according to their crimes. Their punishment, however, is completely just and fair. They pay the penalty only for their own unbelief and disobedience. If the offender is possessed of faith, though he must first suffer the punishment prescribed by Allāh, he will eventually leave the Fire and enter Paradise, by the intercession of the Glory of the Universe. But if he is an unbeliever he will remain there everlastingly.

The knowledge that there is a way out of the Fire—out of Hell—should not cause believers to underestimate the seriousness of entry into that Fire. If the place called Hell were no hotter than a steam bath, how long could you endure it? On summer nights we find pests like mosquitoes, bugs, fleas and bluebottles intolerably irksome, even though it lies within our power to escape the discomfort they inflict; how then shall we endure Hell's frightful torments, when we no longer have our independent volition?

Those who disbelieve in Our signs, surely We shall roast them in a fire; as often as their skins are well-cooked We shall give them other skins in exchange, that they may taste the torment. Allāh is indeed All-Mighty and Wise. [4:56].

Whatever exists in the Hereafter has its symbol or counterpart in this world. There is this difference, however: the things we see in this world are

fleeting, whereas those in the Hereafter are permanent, eternal. The wooded and well-watered places, the lovely valleys and streams of this world are modeled on the beauties of Paradise. Fine fruits, gold, silver, diamonds, pearls, emeralds, rubies and coral are symbolic of the charms of Paradise. The beautiful people we see in this world symbolize the houries and attendants of Paradise. There is in Paradise a tree called Tuba, whose roots are above and its leaves below. This is represented by the sun. The moonlight hints at the radiant faces, not only of the houries who live in Paradise, but also of those destined to go there. Our youthful vim and vigor point to our eternal youthfulness in Paradise. The differences among worldly estates are a sign of the degrees of superiority held by the denizens of Paradise according to their respective merits. The various foods and delicacies of this world are a foretaste of the gustatory delights Allāh will grant us there …

These bounties belong only to those who know the purpose for which such blessings are created, to those who practice righteousness and believe in the Lord of All Worlds and in His Beloved, the blessed Prophet. When a person has goods or merchandise to display and put out for sale, he does not expose the whole of those wares in the market. Just as the merchant produces only samples to show the kind of goods he has to offer, so the Lord of All Worlds shows us specimens in this world of the bounties or torments He has in store. Having described these bounties which He has prepared for people of faith, and having mentioned them in His Noble Scripture mediated by His Prophets, He invites us to His Paradise and Beauty. All this, of course, is for those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Each person will achieve divine favor in accordance with his deeds. Just as in this world … But in the Hereafter these bounties are only for people of faith. The unbelievers have nothing to look forward to in the Hereafter. The place they are bound for is Hell, and what a bad place that is. The believers will enjoy permanently in the Other World the pleasures of a happy life here below. The waterless deserts, the icy wastes of the north and south poles,

the volcanoes that exist on earth, all these are signs and symbols of Hell. The lava emitted by the volcanoes represents the rivulets of Hell. The terrifying oceans symbolize the seas of fire in Hell. Bitter and inedible fruits are reminiscent of Hell's zaqqūm, while bub bling springs represent its boiling waters. Dreadful diseases by the thousand, leprosy and syphilis, faces deformed by the pox, all point to the torments of Hell. Purulent and festering sores on people are the counterparts of the filthy liquids flowing in the rivers of Hell. Blind people in this world are a reminder that the unbelievers will have their eyes blinded and be thrown in that condition into Hell. Epileptic and apoplectic sicknesses in this world signify the attributes of those who practice usury and do not observe human rights. Prison exemplifies Hell, the wards of the former corresponding to the pits of the latter. Murderers, thieves, serious offenders and convicts represent the inmates of Hell. The cells and strait- jackets betoken the instruments of punishment that exist in Hell.

You will see the offenders that day coupled together in fetters, their shirts of pitch, their faces enveloped by the fire. [14:49-50]

Surely we have prepared for the unbelievers chains, shackles and a blazing fire. [76.4]

The prison governor corresponds to an angel called Mālik, the chief angel of Hell, while the duties of the guards are performed in Hell by nineteen angels called zabāniya. The trial and punishment of lawbreakers reflect the fate of those who transgress the law of Allāh. The nation's forces of law and order operate to bring the guilty to justice, as their angelic counterparts operate by Allāh's command. Just as in this world some people may be shadowed by undercover police or agents of national security and, in due course, questioned about their actions, each human being is shadowed by two angels who constantly monitor our deeds, good and bad. These angels

are Allāh’s security agents, equivalent to police detectives. They are called recording angels [kirāman kātibīn]. They make a written record of all our actions whether good or bad. We do not see them, but they are always with us and follow us wherever we go.

Just as police demand to see our passport when we enter a country, two angels come and ask us for our passport when we enter the tomb. That is to say, they ask us about Allāh, the Messenger, religion, faith and scripture. Crossing the border between one country and another symbolizes the passage from this world to the Hereafter, while the questions of the immigration authorities represent those that will be put to us by the angels. The verification of our belief in Allāh’s blessed Messenger Muhammad, the beloved ambassador of the divine government, is like the visa stamped in our passport by the embassy of the country we are going to visit. The fact that we shall not be admitted and may even be arrested if our visa is not certified is symbolic of the detention of the unbelievers in the tomb …

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There is a lesson to be learned from everything that exists in this world. Nothing that Allāh has created is futile. Even apparently useless creatures like snakes and scorpions should be instructive to us. For example, let us imagine a country where everybody has a turn at being ruler for a definite period. When someone has had his turn, they put him in a boat and leave him on a desert island far out at sea. That island is the haunt of snakes, harmful insects and carnivorous beasts. All our predecessors have had their turn in government and then have been cast off on that island. If we take a lesson from their fate, then when our turn comes we remember that we are to be cast on the island and decide to make it habitable against the day when we must go there. We kill off the snakes and insects on it and exterminate its wild animals, making it fit for habitation. Everything in this parable has

its analogy in earthly life. The spell in government represents our life on earth. The boat corresponds to the coffin, the sea to death, that awful island to the tomb and our life in the Hereafter. Those who do not make that place ready, who do not clear out the scorpions and snakes, go to their doom without preparing a place of refuge for themselves and symbolize those who die without faith or without repentance or who, although believers, must face punishment for their sins. Those, on the other hand, who use their time in government to make that place habitable represent those who think of the Hereafter even in this world and who prepare a place there by performing righteous deeds.

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Advice of the Venerable Abū Dardā'

Let us not waste our precious lives … Somebody once came to the venerable Companion Abū Dardā, saying: 'I want to be a good man, but my heart is sick. O Imām, prescribe for me a remedy from the Qur'ān, a cure from the pharmacy of the blessed Prophet Muhammad.' Abū Dardā' said to him: 'My son, this is my prescription for you: perform the funeral prayer, go round hospitals and visit the cemeteries. This will cure your malady.' The man acted on this good advice.

If people could be reformed by performing funeral prayer, the funeral Imāms would be saints. If visiting the tombs could bring people to the Truth, grave-diggers would be angels. If visits to the sick made people human, nurses would be perfect human beings. Look carefully at the advice that man was given. He performed the funeral prayer in the same way as our funeral Imāms. His visits to the tombs were like those of the gravediggers. He visited the sick like a hospital attendant. And nothing did

he gain. His heart became as dark as theirs. So back he went and complained to Abū Dardā': 'O Imām, I followed that advice of yours, but my heart is as hard as ever. I derived no benefit whatever from your advice.' To this Abū Dardā' replied: 'Ah my son, you must have performed your funeral in the manner of the latter-day Imāms; you cannot have done it properly. As you were performing the funeral prayer did it occur to you to think: It is I who am lying in this coffin, these prayers are for my funeral?' Did you say to yourself: 'It is I they have stripped naked; it is I who have been deprived of wealth and rank; my wife is a widow, my children are orphans; they are putting me away in the dark earth, I have no will of my own; they have bound me without rope or chains; here I am alone with my evil deeds; now the two angels will come and question me; what am I to do alone in this house of darkness?' The man said: 'No, I thought of no such thing.' Abū Dardā' then told him: 'You will gain nothing from performing the funeral prayer as you did. On the contrary, it will blacken your heart. Now go and do it again, thinking of the things I told you about.'

The Blessed Jesus Whispers Something to a Sheep

One day, the blessed Jesus caught a sheep from a pasturing flock and said something in its ear. The sheep stopped eating grass and would take no water.

A few days later, as the blessed Jesus was passing that same pasture, he pointed to the sheep and said to the shepherd: 'Is that animal sick? Why is it not eating grass and taking water like the rest?' Not recognizing him, the shepherd replied: 'A person recently passed this way and said something in this sheep's ear. From that day to this the animal has been stupefied.'

If you are curious to know what the venerable Jesus said in the sheep's ear, let me tell you. What the blessed Jesus said was: 'Death exists!' Although it was only an animal, when it heard of death that sheep stopped eating and drinking and went into this state of stupor.

THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH

What about us human beings? Although our loved ones die and pass away before our very eyes, we laugh and play as if our turn to die would never come. We continue to disobey Allāh in a hundred thousand ways. And yet, a far greater responsibility rests on us than on the animals. For us death means a questioning and a reckoning. Those who cannot take a lesson from death are incapable of learning from anything. Such people are unable to manage themselves and cannot serve Allāh. The intelligent person pays heed to death and bears in mind that he himself must die one day. He makes preparation against that dreadful day. He spends every day of his life in worship and obedience to Allāh. He recollects that every prayer he performs may perhaps be his last and worships his Lord accordingly. No harm will come to anyone from those who worship in this fashion, because they do not transgress the divine commands and do not touch what He has forbidden.

Let us think for a moment … What became of our fathers? What became of our grandfathers? What became of the Pharaohs, of the Nimrods and all those for whom this world was hardly big enough? What became of those who proclaimed their own divinity, who supposed they would never die? Where have they all gone, what has become of them all?

The palaces they thought would never be destroyed are now inhabited by spiders, snakes and scorpions. Not a trace remains of the bodies they looked

after with such infinite care or the heads they crowned with richly jeweled diadems. Where are the armies, the troops, the captains they commanded in this world? Would you not think they had never been on earth at all, had never lived in this transitory world? Does not each one of them lie alone with his deeds in some unknown hole or other? Surely the believers among them are enjoying the recompense for their faith and good deeds, while the unbelievers are suffering the penalty for their disbelief?

In the very near future we ourselves, like those who have gone before us, will taste death and be left alone with our deeds. Death is a stream from whose water every living creature must drink. The shroud is one costume that all must sooner or later don. The coffin is a carriage in which all must eventually ride. The tomb is the gate of the Hereafter and through that gate each one of us must pass.

Our Master the Sultan of the Prophets said: ‘Seize the opportunity to appreciate five bounties before five things arrive:

1. Appeciate life before death comes.

2. Appreciate health before sickness comes.

3. Value spare time before preoccupations come.

4. Appreciate youth before old age arrives.

5. Appreciate affluence before poverty comes.’

Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent also stressed the importance of health this couplet:

There is nothing people value more than good fortune and wealth

Whereas nothing in the world means more than a breath of good health.

A Saint Brings Relief to Sultan Mustafa III

Mustafa III asked a saint: ‘What are the pleasures of this world?’ The saint replied: ‘To eat, drink and break wind.’

This answer annoyed the Sultan, who dismissed the saint from his presence. But the saint cursed him saying: ‘My Emperor, may you eat and drink but not defecate!’ This prayer was accepted and the Sultan ate and drank but was unable to excrete. Naturally his discomfort got worse by the day but despite the attentions of all the doctors he could do nothing to relieve his constipation. Realizing that this was the result of the saint’s malediction, he sent for the holy man and begged him to relieve his condition. Said the saint: ‘If you will give me your empire I will let you break wind once.’

What could the wretched Sultan do but agree? His life was ebbing away. The saint put his hands on the Sultan’s stomach and stroked it once. The

monarch broke wind and heaved a sigh of relief. ‘You see, my Emperor,’ said the saint, ‘I have bought your empire for the price of a fart.’ The Sultan caused the mosque he had built to be dedicated to his memory. To this day that mosque is known not as Sultan Mustafa Mosque but Laleli after the name of the saint.

Let us heed the advice of the venerable Abū Dardā’, and take warning from the condition of others. Little though we realize it, it is in fact great divine favor that allows us to take in food and then excrete the waste matter.

Let us remember the advice of Abū Dardā’:

‘When you visit the tombs, be aware that where you tread there lie the cheeks, the lips once loved by someone. Beneath your feet may lie some prince’s face, some emperor’s breast. While they yet lived, you could not have approached their servants even. Now they are silent, unannounced. The day will come when you are just as they are now. With thoughts like these, you should visit the tombs.’

The Venerable Usāma Learns How to Weep

One day the blessed Prophet was counseling his Companions. As they listened to his sweet words, some of them wept from fear of Allāh and some from love of Him. The venerable Usāma was the only one not weeping. He lamented his state to the blessed Messenger of Allāh, who placed his blessed hands upon his breast and said: ‘ukhruj yā iblīs (Out, O Satan!)’ Now at last Usāma began to weep. The blessed Messenger turned to his Companions saying: ‘The inability to weep is caused by hardness of heart,

hardness of heart is caused by multiplicity of sin, multiplicity of sin is caused by forgetfulness of death, forgetfulness of death is caused by ambitious expectations, ambitious expectations are caused by excessive love of the life in this world.'

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The religion of Islam and the Noble Qur'ān are censorious of this world. What is this world? It is not wealth, property, status, money, rank, clothes and children. Whatever keeps you from your Lord, that is this world. For instance, a person who owns all this world has to offer, yet does not forget his Lord and serves Him with perfect devotion, that person is no worldly materialist but Allāh's beloved servant, a member of our Prophet's Community. A poor person, on the other hand, may deserve to be called materialistic if he becomes a beggar and lets his begging prevent him from worshipping his Lord. He is not acceptable in the sight of Allāh and His Messenger.

In short, while your hands are about their work your heart should be with the Beloved. Let the whole world belong to you while you belong to Allāh. You should work for this world as if you were immortal, while preparing for the Hereafter as if you would die tomorrow. Treat everyone well. Have compassion for every creature. Be just, loyal, honest, hard-working and upright. That is how you must be, for that is how believers are.

BELIEVERS, HYPOCRITES AND UNBELIEVERS

A believer means someone who believes in God, the Prophets, the Books of scripture, the angels, the Resurrection, that fate—good and bad—is from God and that we shall be brought back to life after death to account to Him for our life in this world. Our Prophet has told us that a Muslim is one by whose hand and tongue no harm is caused to anybody. If you are incapable of positive good, at least try not to cause harm. If you can state these beliefs, holding them in your heart and confirming them by your actions, then you are a perfect believer. Those who do not match their actions to their words and convictions are unrighteous and sinful. Their pardon is up to Allāh in His mercy.

Allāh may punish or pardon such disobedient sinful servants as He wills. In my humble opinion, a person who believes in his heart and professes his belief will not be capable of serious wrongdoing. He will not be able to transgress the Divine Commands. But those who say they believe, yet have no faith in their hearts, are hypocrites.

Surely the hypocrites are in the lowest layers of the fire and you will find no helper for them. [4:145]

Those who hold none of these beliefs, deny any one of them, or believe in some and deny the rest, are infidels.

Surely those who disbelieve in God and His Messengers and try to make distinctions between Allāh and His Messengers, saying: ‘We believe in some and disbelieve in others,’ seeking a way between—those in truth are the unbelievers: and We have prepared for the un believers a humiliating punishment. [4:150-151].

The blessed Messenger has told us: ‘The marks of the infidel are three:

1. They are liars.

2. They do not keep their promises.

3. They betray trust.’

Such are the actions that constitute hypocrisy. By these attributes hypocrisy can be detected. If you find these qualities in yourself you must repent and forsake these bad habits. Before the gate of repentance is closed Allāh will pardon every kind of sin. Turn back to Him. Regret that comes too late is useless. If you have said: ‘there is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is Allāh’s Messenger’ and believed in the six articles of faith, it means that you have lit the candle of faith.

But a candle by itself will not burn in the open; unless you put it in a lantern the wind will blow it out. Thus, the candle of faith requires the five fundamentals of Islam. The first of these: ‘there is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is Allāh’s Messenger,’ represents the burning wax. The other four, which are necessary to protect the burning wax, are: ritual prayer, fasting, zakāh and pilgrimage. But more than this is required. The glass of the lantern may break, so wire must be wound around for its protection. This wire stands for good moral character. Unless you possess good moral character, there is no merit in performing prayers, keeping the fast, giving alms or making pilgrimage. If there is no wire around the lantern, the glass will break and when the glass breaks the candle will go out, in other words, faith will be gone.

THE SEVEN TIERS OF HELL

The unbelievers are herded into Hell according to their degrees of disbelief. When they reach Hell its gates are opened and they are dragged within to their fearful punishment. As they moan and groan, blaming one another and crying out to God because of the horror and violence of the divine punishment, the guards of Hell say to them: ‘Did not your Prophets, men of your own human race, recite to you their revelations informing you of this Day of Allāh, this punishment?’ Did they not put you in fear of this fire? Did they give you no news of these bitter days, these painful moments?’ The unbelievers reply: ‘Messengers did come to us, did inform us of this punishment, did communicate their revelations to us. But we did not believe. This punishment is only what we deserve. We were too arrogant; no words had any effect upon us.’ They will then be told: ‘Well then, into Hell you go to remain there forever. Suffer the penalty for your disbelief.’ What a foul, disgusting place is Hell. It is the home of wrongdoers who do not accept the truth and disobey their Lord.

As Allāh’s blessed Messenger has told us, Hell has seven tiers, that is seven places one above the other.

The first tier is called Sa°īr. Those who undergo their punishment here are sinful believers, those who disregard the rights of men and animals, those guilty of adultery, fornication and sodomy, those who disobey their parents, deserters in the face of the enemy, those who consume the property of orphans, those guilty of cruel oppression, those who do not perform their prayers, those who do not pay the zakāh and those who tell lies. When by reason of their faith their punishment comes to an end they will be liberated from the fire through the intercession of the blessed Messenger.

The second tier is Lazā.

The third tier is Saqar.

The fourth tier is Jahīm.

The fifth tier is Jahannam.

The sixth tier is Hāwiya.

The seventh tier is Hutama, which is an appallingly repulsive place. Here the hypocrites will remain eternally and the heat of their punishment, far from lessening, will on the contrary steadily increase. They will find the intensity of the fire unbearable.

The Venerable Mu°ādh Asks for an Interpretation

The venerable Mu°ādh ibn Jabal once asked: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, what is the meaning of verse (78:18): ‘On a day when the trumpet is blown and you come in troops?’ According to Mu°ādh’s own report: “The blessed Messenger of Allāh wept so profusely while explaining the meaning of this Verse that his clothes were soaked with the tears that streamed from his eyes. This was the interpretation he gave: ‘That is a very weighty question,

O Mu°ādh. My Community will be resurrected in eleven troops. The first troops will be gathered from their graves without hands or feet and brought thus into the presence of the All-Mighty. A herald will proclaim God's threat to the people awaiting resurrection: "Those gathered here without hands or feet are immoral sinners. The reason they have been punished so is that although they belonged to the Community of a Prophet like the venerable Muhammad, these miscreants paid no attention to the counsels of that blessed Prophet and ignored the Revelations he cited and the wise advice he gave; they are vile wretches who harmed and oppressed their neighbors. Their recompense is the Fire, their destination Hell." They will then be herded into the Fire.' "

The blessed Prophet said: "When Gabriel informed me of the neighbor's rights, I thought our neighbors might be made our partners and heirs." He also said: "He who fills his own stomach while his neighbor goes hungry, that man is no believer."

Saint Hasan al-Basrī Impresses an Unbelieving Neighbor

Saint Hasan al-Basrī once fell sick. His neighbor, an unbeliever, came to pay him a visit. "O Imām," he exclaimed, "I detect a bad smell." The Imām told him it was caused by his illness, but the neighbor insisted: "That is not the odor of sickness. It is a lavatory smell. For the love of Allāh, tell me what it is!" He had not noticed that sewage was leaking from his house into that of the Imām. When the neighbor pressed him, the Imām finally said: "For some months your drain has been seeping through to our side. I tried to fix it, but without success." His neighbor asked why he had not told him before, but the venerable Imām said: "I might have offended you." The unbeliever was so impressed by this ethical refinement that he was ennobled with true faith, for he recognized the Imām's morality as a ray of Islam.

Continuing the Interpretation Given to Mu°ādh

“As for the second group, they will be brought to the Place of Resurrection in the shape of swine. As they are herded into Hell, the heralds will proclaim: ‘These are the wrongdoers who attached no weight or importance to their prayers; though they did perform them, they did so inattentively, unconscious of their place of prostration. Hell is their destination too.’

“The third group will be brought to the Place of Resurrection struggling to shake off the odious serpents coiled around their necks. A herald in Allāh’s service will cast them into the Fire, calling out as he does so: ‘These are the rich people who deprived the poor, appropriating the goods entrusted to them, and who did not pay their alms-due. Their recompense is the Fire, their destination Hell.’

“As for the fourth group from my Community, they will be dragged, bleeding at the mouth, to the Place of Resurrection. As they are herded into the Fire, the heralds will cry: ‘These were dishonest in their buying and selling; they are the counterfeiters who dupe and swindle people. Their recompense is the Fire, their destination Hell.’

“The fifth party will be brought for Resurrection in a very nasty, filthy, foul-smelling condition, to be herded into the Fire as the heralds declare: ‘These are hypocritical folk. While committing sins they would hide their guilt for fear of other people. They sinned, however, without the slightest fear of Allāh. For these, too, the recompense is the Fire and the destination Hell.’

“As for the sixth group, they are brought from their tombs with their tongues tied and protruding, with blood and pus running from their mouths, and with their heads severed at the neck. As they are ushered into the Fire, the heralds cry: ‘This gang consists of those who bore false witness and concealed the evidence when they could have testified to what they saw or knew. For these, too, the reward is the Fire and the destination Hell.’

“The seventh company will be brought forth naked and ashamed, rubbing their faces in the dust. As they are herded into the Fire, the heralds will say: ‘O you who await the Resurrection, these are adulterers and fornicators, the enemies of honor. They have tasted death unrepentant. For them, too, the penalty is the Fire and their abode is Hell.’

“The eighth company will be brought forth from their tombs with their bellies full of fire, their faces darkened and their eyes pale, to be herded into Hell while the heralds proclaim: ‘These are the folk who consume illicit gains. They wrongfully consume the rights of orphans. They attach no importance to human rights, which they ignore. These are villains and robbers. For this gang also, the retribution is the Fire and Hell is their station.’

“The ninth set will be brought from their tombs afflicted with leprosy and elephantiasis. As they are cast into the Fire, the heralds will identify them by saying: ‘These ungrateful wretches ignored their duty to their parents. Their reward is the Fire and their place is in Hell.’

“The tenth batch will be brought from their tomb with their eyes blind and their hearts unfeeling. As they are driven into the Fire, the heralds will declare: ‘These are the ones who cast aside the Qur’ān and spumed Divine Remembrance, or who forgot the Qur’ān after they had studied it and

learned it by heart. These are the rebels who indulged in all kinds of things Allāh has forbidden, like drinking and gambling, and who never gave a thought to what must become of them now. Their punishment is the Fire and their place is in Hell.'

"Then will come the turn of the eleventh and final group. So blessed are they that they will be brought for Resurrection with faces like the full moon (radiant, that is, like the moon on the fifteenth night), wearing the raiment of Paradise and riding the steeds of Paradise. After crossing the Bridge with the speed of lightning, and drinking the water of Kawthar from the hands of the noble Messenger himself, they will reach Paradise and the Divine Beauty, and will attain the approval of the All-Merciful. This group, being the saved, will be admitted to Paradise with honor, as the heralds proclaim: 'These are the special servants of Allāh. These are the folk who obeyed all His commandments and did good and charitable work for His sake. These are the righteous, who avoided disobedience and all bad things. These are the people of forgiveness, of love and remembrance. They performed their five set prayers in the proper way. They died repentant, affirming the Divine Unity. The reward of these people of faith is Paradise, forgiveness, mercy and approval, and the Beauty of the All-Merciful, which is the highest goal.' "

Surely the friends of Allāh—no fear is on them, nor do they grieve. [10:62].

THE INTERCESSION OF THE BLESSED MESSENGER

When the sinful believers have suffered their punishment in the Fire of Hell, the Almighty Lord will say to Gabriel: "O Gabriel, what are the disobedient members of the Community of Muhammad doing in Hell?" To this, Gabriel will reply: "O Lord, You are All-Knowing. You know better

than I the condition they are in." Then the All-Glorious One will say: "O Gabriel, go and inspect their condition." The venerable Gabriel will go and find Mālik, the governor of Hell, sitting on a cushion in the middle of the Fire. Mālik will stand up out of respect for the blessed Gabriel, to whom he will say: "O Gabriel, why have you come here?" To this question, Gabriel will reply: "O Mālik, I have been sent here to see what the rebellious members of the Community of Muhammad are doing." Then Mālik will say: "Do not ask about the condition of these people. They are in a very bad state, their places are very narrow. The fire has burned and obliterated their bodies. Only their faces and their hearts can be saved because of their faith." Gabriel will say: "O Mālik, raise the curtain that covers them and let me look at them myself. I have been instructed to do so."

Mālik will then give orders to the zabāniya, the guards of Hell, who will open the curtain. When the inmates of the Fire see the blessed Gabriel, they will realize from his beauty that he is not an angel of punishment. Turning to Mālik, they will ask: "O Mālik, who is this being? From the time we entered this fire no beautiful person had ever come to us. We never met an angel such as this." By divine decree Mālik will answer their question thus: "This beautiful angel you see is Gabriel, who brought the inspiration to the venerable Muhammad, the blessed Messenger of Allāh, the Chief of the Prophets." When they hear the name of their Prophet they will raise a great clamor and wailing in Hell, weeping: "Mercy, mercy, O Gabriel! Go to the blessed Messenger of Allāh and convey our greeting to him. You have seen the condition we are in. Now go to that compassionate Prophet of ours and tell him what has become of us. For a long time we have been burning here, suffering torment. There is no one but he who can free us, hold us by the hand and intercede for us." As they remember what they did in the world, they will feel a thousand regrets. Leaving them like this, Gabriel will enter the presence of the Almighty by divine leave. The Most Merciful of the merciful will ask him: "How did you find the Community of Muhammad in My Fire? Did you see what condition they were in?" In fear and dread Gabriel will reply: "O my Lord, I am incapable of describing their state. It is impossibly painful and bad." Then the Lord God will ask: "Did they ask

anything of Me?" "O Lord, Your Most Glorious Majesty knows better than I. They pleaded with me to give their greetings to their Prophet and to tell him their condition." To this the Most Merciful of the merciful will say: "Go quickly and discharge your trust. Report their condition to My Messenger." Weeping, Gabriel will go to find the blessed Messenger of Allāh under the Tuba tree in Paradise in a tent adorned with all kinds of jewels. The Most Noble Messenger will ask him: "O Gabriel, this is the place of happiness, why are you weeping?" Gabriel will reply:

"O Messenger of Allāh, if only you were to see the disobedient members of your Community undergoing torment in the fire of Hell, if only you knew their condition as I do, you would weep much more than I … " Hearing this, the Most Noble Messenger will say: "O Gabriel, are some of my Community in Hell? Did a single member of my Community enter the Fire?" With a cry he will begin to weep. Then he will go at once to the Most High Throne, lower his head in prostration and extol the Lord God in language never used by any Prophet or saint. Then he will hear the Almighty address him in these words: "O My Messenger, O My Beloved, raise your head up from prostration. Whatever you wish is granted. Your intercession is accepted." The Most Noble Messenger will plead: "O Lord, Your judgment against the rebels in my Community has been executed, You have avenged their victims. They have suffered enough, do not torment them any longer." Showing His Divine favor to His beloved, the Lord God will console him, saying "My Messenger, I have authorized you to intercede for the salvation from My blazing Fire of those who die uttering the affirmation of My Unity and in faith. I have presented them to you, My Beloved, as a gift."

The Most Noble Messenger will rush to Mālik, the highest official of Hell, and ask him about his Community. Mālik will give him a detailed account of the punishment of its disobedient members. The Most Noble Messenger will say: "O Mālik, open the curtains, let me see the condition of my Community." Mālik will order the zabāniya to lift the veil and when it is

open, the rebel Community in the fire, seeing the Messenger of Allāh, will immediately moan and cry: “O Messenger of Allāh, help, intercede O Prophet of Allāh.” Every mouth will cry: “O Messenger of Allāh, the fire has burnt our bodies to charcoal. We can bear no more punishment. Rescue us from this place … ” By Divine leave the venerable Muhammad, may Allāh bless him and give him peace, will rescue and liberate every one of them from the Fire. Washed by the Water of Life at the Gate of Paradise and made perfectly clean again, they will have their youth restored. Their faces will be like the full moon. Only, these words will be written on their foreheads: “These were the People of the Fire. Allāh, the All-Merciful freed them from that fire.” With this writing on their foreheads they will enter Paradise. After a while they will plead with the Lord to have that writing removed from their brows, explaining that it leaves them in shame, in sorrow and remorse. The All-Glorious One will accept their prayer, and will erase that writing from their brows.

Having been rescued from torment because of their faith, and through the intercession of Muhammad, the disobedient members of his Community rejoice in divine favor. Not so the unbelievers, who are doomed to the Fire for all eternity.

Allāh, save us from the Fire, and admit us to Paradise with the righteous …

THE SEVENTH DISCOURSE

Opening the Gates of Paradise

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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And race to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden wide as the heavens and earth which has been made ready for the heedful. [3:133].

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THE SPECIAL BLESSINGS OF THE MONTH OF RAJAB

Certain days are most special because on them the mercy of the Lord abounds, His grace and bounty overflow like the ocean, He bestows pardon and forgive ness upon His servants, and He brings joy to those who repent to Him by honoring them with Paradise and His Beauty. It is of His loving mercy that He grants us such days, such nights, such hours.

These special times include the first night of the month of Rajab, and the first Friday night of that same month. The following noble Tradition was reported by the venerable Hasan, beloved grandson of the blessed Prophet: “There are four nights in the year when Allāh’s mercy, forgiveness, generosity, bounty and grace fall like rain upon the world. Blessed are they who know or will come to know the value of these nights, namely: 1) The first night of the noble month of Rajab; 2) The night called Barā’a (Absolution), the fifteenth night of the noble month of Sha°bān; 3) The night of the feast of Ramadān; 4) The night of the feast of Sacrifice.”

Since Islam follows a lunar calendar, the beginning of each day is reckoned from sunset. Thus the fifteenth night of the noble month of Sha°bān is the night of the fourteenth to fifteenth. The night of festival marking the end of

the month of fasting is the night between the last day of the noble month of Ramadān and the first day of the festival. The first night of the feast of Sacrifice is the night between the eve of that festival and its first day. Friday night is the night between Thursday and Friday.

Those who appreciate the worth and value of such nights spend these blessed times not in disobedience but in worship and obedience, charity and good works, prayer and supplication. On such nights they earn the good pleasure of their Lord.

Thawbān Learns About the Month of Rajab

Thawbān, one of the noble Companions, relates: “I was with the blessed Prophet when we came upon a cemetery. Our Master stopped there and began to weep. His breast became moist with the tears that flowed from his eyes. I went up to him and asked: “O Messenger of Allāh, my mother, my father and I myself be your ransom, why are you weeping? Has a revelation come down to you?” He replied: “O Thawbān, those who lie here, the dead who occupy this cemetery, are suffering the Torment of the Tomb. It is on account of their condition that I weep.” He then continued: “If they had spent any of the days of the month of Rajab fasting and had worshipped Allāh at night, they would have been spared this torment.”

The blessed Messenger is also reported as saying: “If someone keeps vigil on the first night of the month of Rajab in worship and obedience, when other hearts die his heart will not die. The All-Glorious One immerses that servant in His mercy and makes him as clean of sin as on the day his mother gave birth. Through the mercy of that night, he receives permission to intercede for seventy people otherwise doomed to Hell.”

What grace and generosity we see here … Not only is he himself pardoned, he also receives authority to intercede for seventy other people. What grace, what generosity, what a blessed night this is. What can we say to those who cannot appreciate the worth and value of this night, who disobey Allāh and follow other ways, who do not appreciate this precious life of theirs but throw it to the winds?

If a man were to throw his gold and his diamonds into the sea, destroy the house in which he lives and set fire to his property, we would pity him and say: “The poor man must have lost his reason.” And we would be right to feel sorry for him. At least he would have the possibility of working and earning so as to recover these goods. But neither money nor labor can bring back life that is gone. Is it possible for those who waste their lives, even spending them in sin, to return to life when death has come? Of course not. This means that your precious life is more valuable than gold, emeralds or anything else.

The blessed Messenger is reported as saying: “My Community, be careful to take advantage of Allāh’s Month (that is, the month of Rajab). The month of Rajab is certainly Allāh’s Month. If someone who hopes for reward from Allāh will fast for one day in that month, Paradise will be his of right. He will definitely go to Paradise. If he keeps fast for two days he will attain a position in the sight of Allāh such as no one in heaven or earth can describe. If he fasts for three days he becomes immune to the sorrows of this world and the torments of the Hereafter, to madness, elephantiasis and leprosy, and to the mischief of other people. For anyone who fasts for seven days in the month of Rajab, the seven Gates of Hell will be shut. If he fasts for eight days to earn the pleasure of Allāh, the eight Gates of Paradise will be opened for him. If he fasts for ten days Allāh will grant whatever he wishes. If he fasts for fifteen days, his former sins are not only forgiven, but

transformed into good deeds. If anyone fasts for more than fifteen days, Allāh will increase his reward accordingly."

According to another noble Tradition, recorded in a book called Rawdatu-l °Ulamā, fasting to please Allāh on the first day of the noble month of Rajab is expiation for three years of sins past, fasting on the second day is atonement for two years of sins past, fasting on the third day for one year of past sins, while fasting on each of the fourth and subsequent days gives expiation for one month of previous sin. Only those sins are pardoned, however, which are matters between man and Allāh; the rights of other people are not affected. The fulfillment of human rights is an absolute obligation, that is to say it is our bounden duty to satisfy anyone who has a right over us.

Our noble Master said that on the night of his Ascension he saw a river in Paradise the water of which was sweeter than honey, colder than snow and sweeter smelling than musk. He asked Gabriel, on him be peace: "Who drinks from this river?" The blessed Gabriel replied: "The name of this river is Rajab. If any member of your Community fasts in the month of Rajab and pronounces blessings upon you, the Exalted Lord will grant that he drink of this river."

Those who would drink of that river must fast in Rajab, Allāh's Month', and give blessings to the Messenger of the Almighty, the Intercessor on the Day of Judgment.

In its Arabic spelling the word "Rajab" consists only of the three consonants 'R', 'J' and 'B'. The letter 'R' is the initial of Rahma, God's Mercy; 'J' stands for jurm, meaning crime, while the letter 'B' is the first in the word barī', meaning innocent. The All-Glorious One says: "My servant,

you are guilty of crime and sin. Of My mercy I have absolved you of these and made you innocent. For the sake of your disobedience and sin I have granted you this month." Learned scholars have stated that these letters have this symbolic value. When the month of Rajab is over it enters the Divine Presence and the All-Glorious and Exalted One says to it: "O My Month! I wonder if they loved you? Did My Servants treat you with respect?" The month of Rajab will say nothing in reply, though the Lord will ask the same question over and over again until Rajab finally says: "O Lord, You are the Veiler of Faults! You have commanded Your servants to hide the faults of others. Your Messenger named me the 'Deaf Month.' I heard what Your servants did in obedience but I was deaf to their disobedience and sin." This explains why the month of Rajab is known as the 'Deaf Month.' The All-Glorious One says: "You are My month, you hear no sin. Since you accepted My servants along with their sins and disobedience, I have done likewise and forgiven them for your sake. Provided they once show remorse, I shall forgive them any sin and disobedience they commit during you."

Another reason why the month of Rajab is called the 'Deaf Month' is this: Two Recording Angels are always at our side writing down the good and bad things that we do, but it is a peculiarity of Rajab that during that month they record only our worthy actions and not the evil ones. Since in this month of Rajab the bad deeds of those who display penitence and remorse are kept from the sight and hearing of the angels, they cannot record them.

Our noble Master said: "Certainly Rajab is Allāh's Month. The month of Sha°bān is my month and Ramadān is the month of my Community."

According to Imām al-Suyuti in his book called al-Jāmi° al-Saghīr, the venerable Abū Hurayra said: "Apart from Ramadān itself, the blessed Messenger fasted most often in the months of Rajab and Sha°bān."

The literal meaning of Rajab is: “To revere, to regard as great.” The custodians of the Ka°ba keep it open from the first of Rajab to the last, out of reverence and respect for this month. In other months, they keep the Ka°ba shut except on Mondays and Thursdays. They say: “This month is God’s Month and this house is God’s House. Since man is God’s servant how can we keep him out of God’s House in God’s Month?”

The Woman Who Honored the Blessed Month of Rajab

There was once a woman in the Sacred Mosque in Jerusalem, where she worked as a servant to please Allāh. When Rajab came around she added to her daily worship by reciting Sūratu-l-Ikhlās twelve times in honor of the month. One year she was following her usual practice of reciting this special chapter of the Holy Qur’ān, when one day she cried: “My son, my death is near. When Allāh calls me away I want you to have a shroud made for me out of these old clothes which I have always worn while worshipping my Lord and serving Him.” This was her final will.

A few days later she died (or rather, she passed into another realm of being, for believers “become”; it is unbelievers who die), but the son did not carry out his mother’s will. He bought a new shroud to wind his mother in. He felt bad before friend and enemy alike about having her shroud made out of her old clothes. That night he saw his mother in a dream. She asked him reproachfully: “Why did you not carry out my will?”

When morning came the son took his mother’s old clothes and headed for the cemetery, intending to carry out her instructions. He had no choice but

to open his mother's tomb, for in his dream she had said to him: "Why did you not execute my will? I am displeased with you. I hold this against you."

But when he looked, the tomb was quite bare. His mother was not in it. He was bewildered. Only yesterday he had buried her here with his own hands and performed her last rites. He began to weep; what should he do now? The he heard a Voice calling: "Have you not heard, did you not know? If someone honors Rajab, which is Our month, We do not leave that person alone in the tomb."

Those who serve Allāh, who love Allāh and are friends of Allāh are not left in the darkness. When they leave this world they find happiness everlasting. They go to eternal life. They are accorded bounties such as no eyes have ever seen, or ears heard tell of, inconceivable to human mind and heart. Take advantage of such days; seize the opportunity they present. Before long you will be taken from this guesthouse in a coffin and, to the sorrow of your friends and the delight of your foes, you will be consigned to that dreadful hole, all alone there with your deeds.

PREPARING FOR THE AFTERLIFE

The friends and companions you will need are your good deeds: faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving and kindness, remembrance of Allāh, truthfulness and respect for the rights of all divinely created beings. Our Master, the blessed Messenger of Allāh, said: "When a person dies, all his actions come to a stop. But of all good deeds there are three that go on working: the reward for these is constantly recorded in the credit column of the Register of Deeds:" These are:

1. Ongoing charity such as the construction of schools and fountains, the opening of wells, the establishment of hospitals and mosques, the opening of canals, road and bridge building, the planting of trees … As long as these charitable works last, the Register of Deeds is left open and the reward for them goes on being recorded.

2. Raising good children: The bringing up of children of good character who serve their religion, their country, their community and their fellow human beings. Even if the child one raises is not one's own but belongs to someone else, the reward for the good it eventually does will be credited to those responsible for its upbringing.

3. Teaching students or providing for their education. Believers have a duty to study the Qur'ānic sciences, but also medicine (including veterinary surgery and pharmacology), engineering, architecture, law, geography, chemistry, economics, and all such branches of knowledge. Since there is great merit in teaching or studying these subjects, the Credit Book is kept open for those who build schools for this purpose so long as students continue to attend them and knowledge continues to be imparted there. But there is one condition to the achievement of this great reward: that one believe in Allāh, the Messenger, and the heavenly scriptures, especially the Holy Qur'ān. For not one of these sciences is outside the scope of the Holy Qur'ān.

If a person does not believe in the things that depend on faith, all his good works can have no value for the Hereafter, as the Holy Qur'ān explicitly states. For one who does not believe, the recompense for the good works we mentioned above is confined to this world. He will be called a great man and pointed to with respect but all these attentions will remain in this world. The capital of the Here after is faith, Islam. There is always the likelihood, however, that those who do this kind of good work, be they members of

other religions or even people of no religion, will on account of those good deeds be blessed before they die with faith and Islam. But it is written in authoritative books that those who forget God's religion and His way, and do not engage in good works, will lose their faith at the last moment and face torment in the Hereafter. Believers should therefore make haste to perform good deeds and charity and to secure their welfare and prosperity both in this world and in the Hereafter. Just as sloth, slovenliness and wickedness will cause one to be deprived of faith, good works are the most important agency for insuring that faith is not lost.

Saint Junayd and the Magian's Reward

Saint Junayd al-Baghdādī, sanctified be his spirit, relates: "One snowy day I saw a Magian feeding his birds. I said to that Fire- worshipper: "You will not see the reward for what you are doing so long as you are without faith and do not enter Islam. Allāh accepts such good deeds only of believers."

The Magian replied: "Perhaps He will not accept it, but surely He sees and knows what I am doing?"

"Of course, He does," said I. "Well then," he said "that is enough for me." Several years later, wishing to visit the House of Allāh during the season of Pilgrimage, I went to Mecca the Ennobled. As I was circumambulating the revered Ka°ba, I noticed a man making the circuit of Allāh's House in a state of profound love and ecstasy. Tears streamed from his eyes as he said: 'O Owner of this Universe! O Lord of this House! You are All-Seeing, All-Hearing, All-Knowing.' His face was aglow with the light of faith. When I looked closely, I recognized this radiant face as that of the Fire-worshipper I had seen feeding the birds one snowy day some years before. After the circumambulation, I approached him and took him gently by the arm.

‘Indeed God saw and knew,’ said he. Then, looking at me in amazement he cried out: ‘God is One, His Messenger is Ahmad,’ and surrendered his spirit.

“At that moment I heard a Voice addressing me: O Junayd, you longed for My House, you came and found My House, He came to Me and found Me.’ ”

SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY

The blessed Prophet once asked: “Do you know what it means for a member of my Community to be bankrupt?” His Companions replied: “The bankrupt among us is someone who has neither money nor goods.” But the blessed Messenger said: “In my Community, the bankrupt is one who presents himself on the Day of Resurrection with his prayers, his fasting and his alms-due, but who also presents himself as one who has reviled somebody, accused somebody falsely, misappropriated somebody’s goods, shed somebody’s blood and ruined some body. He will be made to sit while compensation for all this is paid out of his good deeds; if his good deeds should be exhausted before the accounts are settled, sins will be subtracted from those he has harmed and will be added to his. Then he will be cast into the Fire.”

Faith is perpetuated by righteous conduct, and righteous conduct by following the ethics of the Qur’ān and the noble example of the Messenger. These are the means by which we should correct our bad habits and cultivate good behavior. Even if we fail to achieve anything positively good, we should at least avoid bad habits, for these may result in our dying without faith and suffering eternal torment. Indeed, our punishment may be brought forward into this world.

These fatal weaknesses include vanity, pride, hypocrisy, irascibility (anger), envy and the lust for wealth and status. The love of wealth gives rise to two further ailments for which no doctor has the cure:

1. Gluttony

2. Sensuality

All of the above are spiritual sicknesses. Those afflicted with any of them are absolutely bound to pay the price in this world and the Hereafter, unless we obtain divine help and guidance and rid ourselves of these bad illnesses by repenting and seeking forgiveness.

Vanity, or self-love, is an illness that commonly afflicts dogmatic and sanctimonious people. Satan works on them even to the point of making them lose the value of their prayers, fasting and pilgrimage, deceiving them into believing that nobody keeps God's commands as well as they. In this manner he frustrates their good deeds. People like this consider only themselves fit for Paradise, while consigning everyone else to Hell. They begin to do everything, not for Allāh's sake but to impress other people. This serious affliction is called hypocrisy. Some learned scholars have gone so far as to call hypocrisy concealed polytheism.

Pride or arrogance is very evil indeed and constitutes one of the qualities most hated by Allāh. The arrogant is the enemy of Allāh. It was arrogance that caused Satan to be expelled from Divine Mercy. Our Master, the Lord's

Beloved, has told us that a person in whose heart there is so much as one atom of pride will be unable to enter Paradise. Sanctimonious pride is even worse than the arrogance just described for the latter is directed against others whereas the former is a self-oriented feeling, a form of self-love.

Irascibility is the opposite of placidity. He who rises in anger usually sits down in regret. Quickness to anger is a very serious defect of character. You would not get a believer to leave his religion if you offered him a million dollars, but let him get in a rage and he might utter such blasphemy that all religion and faith would go flying …

Envy is also a very bad characteristic. It burns its owner just as fire bums wood. It drags him into the fire even in this world so that he begins even here to suffer the torment of Hell.

THE LIGHT OF REASON, THE LIGHT OF FAITH AND COMPASSION, AND THE LIGHT OF MODESTY versus THE DARKNESS OF ARROGANCE THE DARKNESS OF GREED AND THE DARKNESS OF ENVY

After his expulsion from Paradise, the venerable Adam spent many years weeping over a single lapse, until he was finally pardoned. Allāh showed him three lights, and told him to ask them their identities. The venerable Adam asked the first light: “Whom do I have the honor of addressing? Your name, if you please?” The first light replied: “I am reason.”

“What are your position and function? Why have you been ennobled?”

“My station is the human head. I distinguish good and evil. All kinds of skills are manifested in those who have me inside their skulls. Words flow from their tongues like the Water of Life. I am the means by which the way to Paradise, the beauty of Truth and Divine approval are attained.”

The venerable Adam expressed the prayer that Allāh might always honor the Light of Reason, then he turned to the second light and asked: “Where is your station, O honored Light? What is your function; will you tell me your name?”

The second light gave this reply: “My name is Modesty. I reside in the human eye. The eye in which I reside sees nothing but Allāh. Even the angels are bashful before those possessed of modesty. The eye in which I reside is a discriminating eye.” As the venerable Uthmān of the Double Light[1] said:

That eye in which there’s no discernment bred

Is like a foe within its owner’s head.

The venerable Adam said: “May Allāh honor you also. How blessed and fortunate are those of our children who possess you!” Then he turned to the third light saying: “What a splendid light you are, what a noble jewel. What are your name and function, and where is your station?”

The third light replied: “My name is Compassion. My station is in the human heart. I reside in believing hearts. Hearts that I have entered are light through and through. Therefore the owner of a heart in which I reside achieves felicity in this world and deliverance in the Hereafter.”

According to another account, the Lord of Majesty showed the venerable Adam the three lights and commanded him to take one of them. The venerable Adam chose the Light of Reason, preferring it over the Lights of Faith and Modesty. But the Light of Faith objected saying: “Reason and I go together, we are inextricably linked.” Then the Light of Modesty added: “And I am inseparable from Faith.” Adam, on him be peace, was then told to look to his left, where he saw three horrible darknesses. They were indescribably foul and horrifying. The venerable Adam was commanded to ask these three darknesses their names, places and functions. To the first of them he said: “How foul you are. What is your name, where is your place, what are your functions?” The darkness replied: “My name is Arrogance. My function is to make men suffer the wrath of the Lord. My situation is the human head. If I am present in someone’s head he becomes far removed from the Truth.”

The venerable Adam said: “Do not lie, O Arrogance! In the human head there is such a jewel, such a light, as Reason.” “Indeed there is,” said that darkness, “but when Reason goes, I take up residence in that head and control that body.”

The venerable Adam then questioned the second darkness: “What is your name, where is your place, what is your function?” The second darkness replied: “My name is Greed. My situation is in the human eye. Any human being in whose eye I reside resigns from humanity and becomes like an animal. Goodbye to religion, faith, knowledge and wisdom, honor, virtue and conscience.”

The Prophet Adam, on him be peace, said: “Hush! Do not lie. There is Modesty in the human eye.” “Indeed there is,” said the darkness, “but when Modesty goes, I enter and with me comes trouble.”

The venerable Elect of Allāh then obeyed the command to address the third darkness: “What a foul creature you are. What is your name, where is your place, what is your function?” The darkness replied: “My name is Envy. My situation is the heart. As for my function, if I settle in a heart neither religion, nor faith, nor truth remain therein. I burn my host in the fire. Those who carry me within them are lower than animals, worse than devils; they are doomed to perdition.”

The Prophet Adam said: “Hush, do not lie, Compassion resides in the heart.” “True, O Adam,” said the third darkness, “I do not co-exist with Compassion but when Compassion leaves, I take its place.”

Love of status is also fatally pernicious. There have been thousands with insatiable ambitions like those who martyred Imām Husayn at Karbalā’ for the sake of the governorship of Tabaristan. They have now gone to the Fire, leaving fowls to roost and spiders to weave their webs in their seats of power.

As for those with a love of wealth, like Qarun,[2] the earth swallows them and their possessions. Their beloved property is divided among their heirs and they are doomed to torment.

Gluttony is an insatiable appetite for food. Gluttons who ate and grew fat, now lie in the earth to fatten snakes and worms.

As for sensual lust, five minutes of pleasure have incalculable lifelong consequences in terms of degradation, abasement, stigmatization, social ostracism and banishment from the Presence of Allāh. Should you be smitten with an infatuation like Zulaykha's, then even though you be a king you will suffer degradation. But if you resist your passion steadfastly like Joseph, on him be peace, then even though you be a slave you will become a king.

The blessed Prophet said: "He who repents for a sin becomes like one who is sinless."

We are weak creatures. Allāh is Strong. We are mortal, He is Everlasting. What could we do if He were suddenly to extinguish the light of our eyes? Should He take away our reason, then whoever we might be they would take us off to the mental hospital. What could we do if our hands withered or our feet were paralyzed? What doctor could help us unless Allāh granted His Healing? It is time we took notice. Every day friends of ours pass into the Hereafter. Our turn will come too. There is no servant and no sin that Allāh, Lord of Majesty, will not pardon. He is the Lord of Generosity. If ever Satan were to prostrate himself at Adam's tomb, saying: "Mercy, O Lord!" even he would be pardoned. We are the descendants of Adam and members of the Community of the venerable Messenger. Our standing is high in the sight of Allāh. If we pardon, we shall find pardon and forgiveness. Paradise has been prepared for us. The literal meaning of the Verse we cited at the beginning of this discourse is this. Allāh invites us to His pardon and forgiveness. He announces that He has made Paradise ready for us. Many as our sins may be, they cannot exceed the mercy of our Lord.

A Man Regrets His Misspent Youth

A fellow who had worshipped in his youth, but had later given it up, looked at himself one day in the mirror and saw grey hairs upon his head and in his beard. “Alas, what have I done?” he said. Then he began to wonder whether, if he repented to Allāh, his Lord would forgive him. He was thinking: “What shall I do, having let my life slip by in disobedience to Allāh?” when he heard a Voice addressing him: “My servant, I loved you. You loved Me, too. Then, although you forsook Me, I did not destroy you but gave you your sustenance. If you repent and come back to Me, I shall love you again.”

Allāh is the Lord of Sovereignty, Whose mercy is abundant, His grace wide and His generosity endless. He pardons those who repent to Him. He forgives their sins. In three months especially, His mercy and generosity overflow. Every night a Voice may be heard: “Are there none who love Us that We may love them? Are there none who repent that We may accept their repentance? Are there none who seek pardon that We may pardon them? Are there none with requests that We may grant them? Are there none seeking Paradise that We may give it to them? Are there none seeking Me that I may show them My Beauty? … ”

The venerable Abū Bakr said: “The first Friday night of Rajab is what we call Laylat al-Raghā’ib.[3] In the third quarter of that night, towards morning, the angels of heaven and earth gather at the Ka°ba and make supplication to Allāh. The All-Glorious One tells them: ‘O My angels, ask of Me whatever you will … ‘ The angels reply: ‘What we ask of Your Most Glorious and Exalted Essence is that you pardon the Community of Muhammad that keeps fast in honor of the month of Rajab.’

“The Lord of Majesty says: ‘Certainly I pardon them and I gladden them with Paradise and My Beauty.’ So saying, He immerses us, the Community of Muhammad, in His mercy.”

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Those who carry the Throne and those round about it hymn the praises of their Lord and believe in Him and they ask forgiveness for those who believe: ‘Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge; therefore, forgive those who repent and follow Your way, and guard them against the punishment of Hell.’ [40:7].

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The venerable °Ā’isha, Mother of the Believers, reported the following from the blessed Messenger: “On the Day of Resurrection all men will be hungry. The only exceptions will be the Prophets, the families of the Prophets, and those who fast in the months of Rajab, Sha°bān and Ramadān. Those who fast in the months of Rajab, Sha°bān and Ramadān will experience neither hunger nor thirst.” The blessed Messenger of Allāh is also reported as saying: “When the Day of Resurrection arrives, a herald will call out: ‘Where are those who fast in honor of the month of Rajab?’ ”

After that a light will appear. Gabriel and Michael will follow the direction of the light. Those who honor the month of Rajab and keep the fast will follow them and pass like lightning across the bridge of Hell called Sirāt.

When they have safely made that dreadful crossing they will all give thanks to Allāh for having sped them across Sirāt. As they make prostration they will hear a Voice addressing them: “O you who respect the month of Rajab, raise your heads from prostration. Prostration was the thing to do in the lower world. Now enter your abodes in Paradise and taste of pure delight!” Such will be the favor shown to those who respect Rajab.

The blessed Messenger said: “If you wish your souls to be taken at the time of death in comfort and without pain or thirst, to be secure at that moment from the evil of Satan and to pass over with faith, then regret and repent your past sins during the month of Rajab and spend most of its days fasting. Remember your Lord very often. Enter safely into Paradise by leave of your Lord.”

The venerable Anas said: “Happening to encounter Mu°ādh ibn Jabal, I asked him: ‘O Mu°ādh where have you been?’—‘I have been with the blessed Prophet,’ said he. ‘Did he say anything?’ I asked, whereupon he told me: ‘I heard that if a person says “There is no god but Allāh,” and says it genuinely and sincerely, he will enter Paradise. He said that if someone fasts for one day to please Allāh in the month of Rajab, he will likewise enter Paradise.’ Then I went to the mosque, where I found the blessed Messenger. I said to him: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, Mu°ādh informs me that you told him that if one says “There is no god but Allāh,” and if he fasts to please Allāh for one day in Rajab, he will enter Paradise.’ He said: ‘Yes, Mu°ādh told the truth. I did say that.’ ”

When Rajab came around, the blessed Messenger used to pray: “Allāh, bless our Rajab and Sha°bān, and bring us to Ramadān!”

THE FOUR SACRED MONTHS

Allāh has divided the year into twelve months, four of which are sacred. Three of the four are successive, namely Dhū'l-Qa°da, Dhū'l-Hijja and Muharram, while Rajab stands alone. These months were honored and respected even in the Time of Ignorance, and we should appreciate them no less. Let us obey our Lord and conform to the commandments of the Qur'ān, that we may enjoy respect in both worlds …

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace be on the Messengers; and praise be to Allāh, Lord of All the Worlds.

NOTES

[1]So called because of his double link of kinship with the blessed Prophet.

[2]A Croesus-like figure mentioned in the Qur'ān.

[3]"The Night of Desires Granted." It was on this night that the blessed Prophet was conceived.

THE EIGHTH DISCOURSE

Benedictions on the Blessed Prophet

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Allāh and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who believe, bless him also, and salute him with peace. [33:56].

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THE SAVING GRACE OF THE NOBLE BENEDICTIONS

Allāh is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner. May His infinite blessings and peace attend our Master the Prophet, his wives, his offspring, his family and his companions! Allāh bless Muhammad, the intercessor for our sins and the physician of our hearts, and give him peace!

Every Muslim must love that Most Noble Prophet, the Primal Light and Final Messenger, for it is he who delivers humanity from unbelief and error, who leads us to right guidance and salvation, who shows us the way to Paradise and brings us to the Divine Beauty. Neither Prophet nor Messenger will come after him. He is the last Prophet. He is the Chief of the Prophets. He is the Guide of the Saints. He is the Messenger and Prophet of men and jinn. Every believer has a duty to love and obey him. Our faith will not be perfect until we love him more than everything we own.

A Righteous Man Learns Never to Omit the Benedictions

An honorable and righteous believer once failed to pronounce the benedictions with which he should have concluded his obligatory ritual

prayer. That night, our Master the Most Noble Prophet appeared to him in a dream and asked him: “Why did you omit my benedictions from your prayer this afternoon?” The righteous man replied: “O Messenger of Allāh, as you surely know, I gave praise to Allāh and extolled Him. But my work was very pressing; in my haste I forgot to pronounce blessings and peace upon you.”

Our blessed Master then said: “Have you not heard my words? Did I not say that good deeds are kept in abeyance as long as benediction is withheld from me? That means they do not obtain divine acceptance; they are not presented to Allāh. Prayers are held in suspense, unanswered. Though a servant perform all the good works in this world, if those good works do not include affection and blessings for me, they will not be accepted on the Day of Resurrection.”

This should not be dismissed as “just a dream, after all.” Our Master tells us, in one of his noble Traditions: “He who sees me in a dream surely does see me. Satan cannot assume my form.” Allāh’s Messenger, on him be blessings and peace, also said: “The miser is he who hears me mentioned but does not bless me.”

According to a well-known Tradition: “The miser will not enter Paradise however pious he may be, but the generous person will be admitted to Paradise even if he is immoral.” When someone feels affection, he constantly mentions the object of that affection. Benediction is a form of worship, maybe the very key to love’s abode. Benediction is the highest form of supplication to Allāh.

We should therefore say: “O my Lord, give blessings and peace to Your Messenger on my behalf! I am incapable of such benediction. Only You,

through Your Divinity, know the blessings and peace he deserves."

Many noble Traditions confirm our understanding that benedictions on the Messenger represent the highest form of prayer and are the cause of our salvation, for instance:

"On the Day of Resurrection, those most worthy of my intercession are those who often give me blessings."

"Every Muslim is accompanied by two angels. If on the mention of my name that Muslim blesses me, the two angels pray: Allāh, forgive this servant of Yours!' But if he does not bless me when my name is mentioned, the two angels say to him: 'You have missed this opportunity. May Allāh not forgive you!' The other angels say 'Amen' to this malediction."

"Whenever a supplication is made, a veil falls between that prayer and Allāh. It is not presented to Him until blessings are given to the Prophet, on him be peace. Only when the supplicant recites the noble benedictions does his petition reach Allāh. That obstacle, that veil, is then removed." (Related by the venerable Anas ibn Mālik.)

"Allāh has created an angel over my tomb and has put him in charge there. The function of this angel will continue till the Day of Resurrection; if any member of my Community gives me blessings, the angel informs me thereof, saying: 'O Messenger of Allāh, So-and-so, a member of your Community, gave blessings to you, the Most Noble Prophet."

This last Tradition was related by the venerable Abū Hurayra and °Ammār ibn Yāsir, who were also present when other Companions asked the meaning of ‘blessings’ in the Verse of the Glorious Qur’ān: “Allāh and His angels bless the Prophet … ” The Messenger told them: “That is secret knowledge. Only Allāh knows the meaning of the blessings. Had it been permitted to me to tell the secret, I would have told it to you.”

A pious individual once dreamed that he was going to meet Allāh’s Messenger, but our Master paid no attention to him. “O Messenger of Allāh,” said the dreamer, “I see that you are angry with me. Have I been guilty of some disrespect toward you?” The blessed Prophet said: “I do not know you!” so the man said: “I am So-and-so, the pious one.” But our Master still denied all knowledge of him. This time the pious man said: “O Messenger of Allāh, I have heard the learned scholars say that you know your Community as a father knows his children … ” To this, our blessed Master replied: “What the scholars say is true. I am your Prophet. I know each one of you as I know my own children. However, my familiarity with you is commensurate with your knowledge of me. I am most intimate with those whose affection for me is greatest.”

BENEDICTIONS ALSO BENEFIT THE SOULS OF THE DEAD

When we visit a cemetery, we should recite the following for the sake of the departed Muslims who lie buried there: three Benedictions, three recitations of Sūrat al-Ikhlās and one reading of al-Fātiha. While doing this, we should remember that we shall be joining them one day. Perhaps, through our offerings, their agony will be alleviated and their torment transformed into bounty.

A Schoolboy’s Invocation Brings Relief to His Father’s Soul

One day, as he was passing through a cemetery, the blessed Messenger stopped beside a grave. Seeing him weep long and loud, his Companions asked: “O Messenger of Allāh, what is the reason for your tears? Has a revelation come down to you? Is that what has affected you so?” Our master replied: “No, that is not the reason this time. I am weeping because of the pain I feel for one who lies here, suffering the torment of the tomb and undergoing dreadful agony. How would it be if the rest of my Community should suffer so?” When they later returned by the same way, he stopped at that grave and smiled. “O Messenger of Allāh,” the Companions ventured to ask, “how can it be that you are now smiling? Just a little while ago you were weeping over the inmate of this very tomb.” Our Master explained: “Gabriel came and told me that the man who lies here has a son. When the boy started school today, he invoked the Name of Allāh, the All-Merciful and Compassionate, and because of that the All-Glorious One transformed his father’s torment into bliss.”

WHY PEOPLE SUFFER THE TORMENT OF THE TOMB

The blessed Messenger of Allāh said: “Four things cause the torment of the tomb, namely: 1) Uncleanliness (in personal hygiene); 2) Disobedience to parents and neglect of their due; 3) Lying (the worst form of immorality); 4) Spreading gossip and causing dissension.”

Remarkable Dreams Experienced by Saint Hasan al-Basrī

A woman once approached the venerable Hasan al-Basrī with this plea: “O Sir, a daughter of mine has died. I wish I could at least see her in a dream.

Teach me how I may see my child just once, and so extinguish the fire of my longing."

The venerable Hasan al-Basrī taught that woman what she should do in order to see her daughter. That Friday night she prayed as she had been taught, earnestly entreating Allāh to show her a vision of her daughter, then lay down to sleep. During the night she dreamt of her daughter in a tragic state, which tore her heart to shreds. For the girl had been made to wear hellish clothes of pitch, had her neck chained and her legs shackled with fire. When the mother woke next morning, she ran weeping to the venerable Hasan al-Basrī. Tearfully describing the terrible condition in which she had seen her daughter, she implored him to tell her how the girl could be saved from this torment, and what she herself could do to help. The venerable Hasan al-Basrī and the others present in the mosque wept for that woman and her poor daughter; thinking of the loneliness of the dark tomb that awaited them also, they begged the Lord of All Worlds to have compassion.

Some time later, the venerable Hasan al-Basrī dreamt one night that he saw a beautiful girl in Paradise, sitting on a highly decorated throne and wearing a crown of indescribable beauty. She seemed brighter than the sun, dressed as she was in garments impossible to describe. She asked Hasan al-Basrī: "Do you recognize me, O Imām? The venerable Imām replied: "Which Messenger's daughter, or Prophet's wife are you?" The beautiful girl then said: "Come now! Remember a lady you once taught to pray so that she might see her daughter? Well, I am that lady's daughter."

"That lady told me her daughter was in torment," said the saint.

"For what reason have you been raised to this elevated station?" The girl replied: "One of Allāh's beloved servants stopped as he was passing the

cemetery where we lay buried. He recited three benedictions upon the blessed Messenger, and donated his reward to us. In that graveyard where I lay, five hundred and fifty people like me had been suffering the torment of the tomb. But now a Voice was heard to call: ‘Cease the punishment of those undergoing torment here! For the sake of the benedictions, five hundred and fifty souls like me were released from torment, and each tomb became a garden of Paradise.”

On another occasion, the saintly Hasan al-Basrī said: “I saw Abū Usāma in a dream, after he had passed on to the Hereafter. I asked him how his Lord had treated him. ‘I was pardoned and achieved bliss,’ he replied. ‘For what reason?’ I asked, and he explained: ‘Whenever I recited a Tradition, I would follow it with benedictions upon Allāh’s blessed Messenger.’ ”

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BENEDICTIONS ARE REWARDED IN BOTH WORLDS

Our blessed Master said: “One day, four of Allāh’s angels came to me. They were Gabriel, Michael, Isrāfīl and °Azrā’īl, on all of whom be peace. The blessed Gabriel said to me: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, if a member of your Community blesses you ten times a day, with a sincere heart, when the Day of Resurrection dawns I shall take him by the hand and lead him, like a bird, across the bridge called Sirāt.’

“The blessed Michael then said: ‘I shall quench that servant’s thirst with the water of Kawthar.’

“The blessed Isrāfīl said: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, I shall fall in prostration to beg pardon for your Community, and I shall not raise my head until the All-Glorious One forgives them.’

“The blessed °Azrā’īl said: ‘O Prophet of Allāh, I shall take away the souls of those who bless you ten times a day, but with the honor due to prophets.’ ”

A Camel Testifies For a Man Falsely Accused

A Muslim was once accused of stealing a camel. The plaintiff produced false witnesses, hypocrites who were ready to perjure themselves, and the innocent man was convicted of theft.

According to Islamic Law, a convicted thief must suffer the amputation of his hand. The unfortunate believer therefore made this supplication: “My Lord, You have power over all things. They have accused me falsely. I did not steal this camel. You are the All-Knowing One. Deliver me from this degradation, for the sake of the benedictions I pronounced upon the Most Noble Prophet. You are Omnipotent. Let the camel speak. Let it be my witness.” As he uttered these words, he heaved such a profound sigh that the Divine Mercy overflowed. It was no difficult task for the Almighty to make the camel speak. The creature began to talk, saying: “O Messenger of Allāh, I belong to this believer. These men are false witnesses, and this fellow has brought a trumped-up charge against this true believer.” The camel then went obediently up to its owner and knelt before him.

The light of faith increased in those who witnessed this event. The falsehood of the perjurers came out into the open, the hypocrites stood publicly disgraced. Our noble Master asked: “O believer, how did you obtain that miracle?” and the believer replied: “O Messenger of Allāh, I always recite benedictions upon you ten times before lying down to sleep.”

The just and blessed Prophet then said: “For the sake of the blessings you gave me, Allāh has not only saved you from having your hand cut off here in this world; He will also save you from the torment of the Fire in the Hereafter. If a person recites benedictions upon me ten times in the evening and ten times in the morning, Allāh will resurrect that servant along with His favored and trusted Prophets and loyal friends, and He will bestow His bounty upon that servant as He does upon His Prophets.”

Saint Sufyān and the Story of the Usurer’s Son

The venerable Saint Sufyān al-Thawrī tells us: “I was on Pilgrimage. While circumambulating the honored Ka°ba, I saw a young man who prayed for nothing except blessings on the noble Prophet. Whether at the Ka°ba, at °Arafāt, at Muzdalifa and Minā, or while making the circuit of the House of Allāh, his only prayer was blessings and peace upon the revered Prophet.

“When I found a convenient moment, I said to him politely: ‘My friend, there is a special prayer for each place. If you do not know them, please allow me to teach you.’ But he said: ‘I know them all. Let me tell you what happened to me, so that you will understand my apparently odd behavior:

“ ‘My people are from Khurāsān; when the Pilgrim caravan left home, my father and I joined it in order to discharge our religious obligations. Passing through mountains, valleys and deserts, we came in due course to the city of Kufa. There my father fell ill; in the middle of the night he passed on to the other world, and I shrouded his body. To avoid disturbing anyone, I put all my trust in Allāh and sat weeping inwardly. After a while, I felt the wish to look once again upon my father, who had left me all alone in that foreign land. But the moment I uncovered his face, I saw that my father’s head had turned into the head of a donkey. Astonished by this sight, I did not know what to do. I could hardly tell anybody what had happened. As I sat there thinking, a sleep-like state came over me. Just then the door of the tent opened to admit a veiled figure. Unmasking his face, he said to me: “How mournful you are! Why this great sorrow?” I replied: “Sir, what has befallen me is no joy. Am I not to grieve, but let others do so?”

“ ‘The stranger then went straight to the place where my father lay, unwrapped the body, and stroked my father’s face. I got up and looked, to see my father’s face more beautiful than of old. It shone like the full moon. At the sight of this miracle, I went up to that blessed individual and asked him: “Who are you, O lover of goodness?” He replied: “I am Muhammad Mustafā.” (May Allāh bless him and give him peace.) When I heard these words, I fell at his blessed feet, weeping and pleading: “What is this all about? Pray tell me, for the love of Allāh!”

“ ‘He then said to me kindly: ‘Your father was a usurer who consumed interest. This is the fate of those who practice usury. Either in this world or in the Hereafter they must assume the shape of an ass, but the All-Glorious One gave your father this shape in this world. However, your father did have one good quality or custom. Every night before going to bed, he used to recite a hundred benedictions upon me. When I came to be informed about your father’s fate, I immediately asked Allāh to let me intercede for him because of this. Having received permission, I came and rescued your father through my intercession.”

“The young man said: ‘I vowed from then on never to make any supplication other than blessings and peace upon the Messenger, for I had come to realize that benedictions upon the Messenger are all a man needs in this world and the Hereafter.’ ”

According to a noble Tradition recorded by Imām Radī al-Dīn Saghānī (in a book entitled Mashāriqu-l’anwār), our blessed Master said: “If a person once invokes benedictions upon me, not one atom of sin will remain in him.”

It goes without saying that this pardon does not extend to offenses against human or animal rights, for it is an absolute requirement that we square the account with any creature we have wronged.

HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS MAY NOT BE NEGLECTED

If we have wrongfully used the property of others, we must either get them to waive their claim against us, or return the misappropriated goods.

The Blessed Jesus and the Man Who Helped Himself to a Toothpick

The blessed Jesus was passing in front of a cemetery, when he saw that the occupant of one of the tombs was suffering torment. He prayed to the Lord of All Worlds that he might learn the cause of this misfortune. The Omnipotent and All-Glorious Lord responded by saying: “O Jesus, petition

Me to bring him back to life, then question him. I revive the dead so that you may see why they undergo torment. Let this be a lesson to those who do not believe in Resurrection after death!”

The venerable Jesus made his petition. The tormented inmate of the tomb stood up, shaking the earth from his head. The blessed Jesus asked him: “Why were you suffering the torment of the tomb?” and the man replied: “O Prophet of Allāh, I used to be a porter while I lived in the lower world. One day I was carrying firewood. Without telling the owner, I took a splinter of wood to pick my teeth. Because of that I am suffering torment.”

If we meddle with the rights of others without regard for legality, if we slander anyone, what will it be like for us in the Hereafter? The merest atom of what we do, be it good or bad, will surely be brought before us and demonstrated to us.

Woe to those who misappropriate the property of orphans. In His Holy Qur’ān, Allāh explains that to consume the property of orphans is actually to consume fire. The invocation of noble benedictions is an expiation for sin. We must repeat, however, that violations of the rights of men and animals are excepted.

HOW TO BE WORTHY OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY OF THE BLESSED MESSENGER

Our blessed Master said: “If a person hears my name mentioned, but does not bless me, that person is fit for Hell. May Allāh graciously remove that person from the Fire.”

Those who wish to be delivered from torment in the Hereafter, and wish to achieve bliss, should invoke the noble benedictions lovingly whenever they hear our Master's name mentioned. They must love our Master, the final Prophet, more than anything, even life itself. They must repent for their sins and avoid falling back into the sewer of disobedience. They must duly make up any prayers they have left undone. If they are rich, they must give the alms-due for Allāh's sake and in His cause. They must keep the fast each year in the month of Ramadān. They must show gratitude to their Lord by performing the Pilgrimage once in their lifetime, in the proper season. They must eschew lying and false oaths, as well as adultery and fornication. They must avoid hypocrisy and ostentation. They must guard against arrogance, pride, dishonesty and backbiting. They must not soil their tongues with bad words, but should rather adorn them by affirming the Divine Unity and by pronouncing benedictions. Allāh grant that we all practice such works of righteousness. Amen.

How the Venerable Jazūlī Came to Write His Famous Book

Sulayman al-Jazūlī was a descendant of the venerable Hasan, the grandson of our Master and the honored son of Imām °Alī and the venerable Fātima. He lived first in the city of Jazūl, then in another city of Muslim Spain. He eventually emigrated to North Africa, settling in the region of Fez, where he engaged in religious teaching, spiritual guidance and worship.

As he was going about the city one day, the venerable Jazūlī stopped at a well to perform his ablution before prayers. Unable to find a rope and bucket with which to draw water, he stood looking around until he saw a little girl on a wall. He called out: "My child, have you a bucket in the house? Let me use it for my ablutions." The little girl replied: "People are

always praising you and talking about your knowledge, goodness and miraculous powers, yet you cannot draw water from a well without rope and bucket!" When he asked her if such a feat could be accomplished, she came straight over to the well and muttered something. By divine grace, the water brimmed over the edge of the well.

After using the water for his ablutions, the venerable Jazūlī said: "My girl, for the love of Allāh and His Messenger, tell me how you were able to achieve this miracle!" The child explained: "By often reciting blessings and peace upon the holy Messenger; by constantly pronouncing the noble benedictions."

Having witnessed this little girl's miracle, the venerable Jazūlī vowed to recite many noble benedictions himself. He spent a sleepless night, however, wondering which benedictions to invoke. He was still pondering this at midnight, when he was amazed to see his wife get out of bed, put on her finest clothes and leave the house. Stricken with jealousy, and curious to know where the lady could be going at that hour, he slipped out into the street after his wife. A remarkable sight now met his eyes. A pride of lions surrounded his wife, and they went off together toward the beach. Amazed and horrified, the venerable Jazūlī followed at a safe distance. His wife went down to the water's edge. Putting out to sea on her prayer-rug, she headed for a lonely island lying just offshore. The lions sat waiting for her at the water's edge. Having reached the desolate isle, the lady took her ablution and performed the prayer of night vigil, devoutly worshipping and entreating the Lord of All Worlds. She made the return journey walking on the surface of the water.

When she reached dry land, the lions again fell in before and behind her and escorted her home. The venerable Sheikh had already gone back to bed, where he was lying awake, waiting. His wife came in, put on her nightdress

and went to bed. Curious to know whether the marvel he had witnessed was a unique occurrence the Sheikh spent three more nights awake. Each night he followed his wife and saw the same phenomenon repeated. Then, on the third morning he showed his hand and asked that blessed lady to explain her secret.

“So now you know about it,” said she. “This has been my custom for many years, ever since Allāh crowned me with this miraculous gift.” The venerable Jazūlī went on to ask how she had achieved such grace, and the lady explained: “Because of my affection for the esteemed and blessed Prophet, and my constant repetition of the noble benedictions.” Her husband then asked: “Which noble benedictions do you invoke?” At first the lady would say nothing to this, but when the venerable Jazūlī insisted, she told him: “Tonight I shall submit the question to Allāh. Then if I receive permission, I shall give you the answer.”

Next morning his wife said: “I am not permitted to tell you explicitly, but collect all the noble benedictions you can find; if it is among them, I shall tell you so.” The venerable Jazūlī then set to work with a vengeance to collect from authoritative books, and from the Sheikhs of his day, all the noble benedictions taught by the blessed tongue of the holy Messenger of Allāh, as well as those used by the noble Companions, and by the honorable scholars and respected Sheikhs in their litanies. He compiled the results of all this research into a book that his wife heard him read. “It occurs there in several places,” she assured him.

Beyond doubt, therefore, those who constantly read that blessed book will obtain Allāh’s mercy and be included among those who are beloved of the venerable Messenger. The venerable Jazūlī gave his book the title Proofs of Goodness and Rays of Light (Dalā’il al-Khayrāt wa-Shawāriq al-Anwār).

May Allāh accept his efforts, forgive his faults, and immerse him in His mercy. Amen.

The venerable Jazūlī migrated to Asfā, on the coast, where he devoted himself to the wise, practical and loving instruction of his students. He stayed in that city for fifteen years before moving to Quwāl. There he taught, and published his book. People from far and wide gathered around him to improve and perfect themselves. As many as twelve thousand one hundred and sixty-five of the pupils capable of receiving guidance from him, later became popular instructors them selves. Killed by poison, he passed to the abode of the Hereafter during the second prostration of the second cycle of the morning prayer, on the sixteenth of Rabī° al-Awwal in the year 870 of the Hijra. May the Almighty Lord have mercy upon him. May He fill his tomb with light, and may He grant us all his intercession in the Hereafter. Amen.

The venerable Jazūlī was buried at the noon prayer, inside the noble mosque, which he himself had erected in that city. When the region fell into infidel hands, seventy-five years later, his pupils opened his tomb, saying: “We must not leave our Master’s body here, to fall into the hands of the unbelievers. Let us carry his body to a Muslim country!” But when they looked inside the tomb, they saw that the venerable Sheikh’s noble body had in no way deteriorated; he was lying there as if he had just been interred. After some of those who loved him had pressed their fingers on his blessed forehead, the blood returned to fill the impressions they had made, just as on a living person … They took his blessed body to Marrakech, where they reburied it. May Allāh’s mercy be upon him. Those who read his book will surely obtain bounties in this world and the Hereafter, including the vision in dreams of the beauty of Allāh’s holy Messenger.

The Man Who Ate Lots of Salted Fish

A certain person wished to see the blessed Messenger in a dream, but he seemed to be incapable of achieving this vision. He therefore approached a noble saint, imploring his advice. That noble being was an intimate friend of Allāh. He said: “My son, on Friday evening you must eat a lot of salted fish, then perform your prayer and go to bed without drinking any water. Then you will see.”

The man followed this advice. He spent the whole night dreaming that he was drinking from streams, fountains and springs. When morning came, he ran crying to the saint: “O Master, I did not see the Messenger. I was so thirsty that all I dreamed about was drinking from fountains and springs. I am still on fire with thirst.” The saint then told him: “So, eating salted fish gave you such a thirst that you dreamed all night long of nothing but water. Now you must feel such a thirst for Allāh’s Messenger and you will then behold his blessed beauty!”

Those who lovingly repeat the noble benedictions will most certainly see the Messenger of Allāh, and anyone favored with that vision is assured of his intercession.

THE GREAT PRAYER OF REPENTANCE

I seek Allāh’s forgiveness! I seek Allāh’s forgiveness! I seek Allāh’s forgiveness! I seek forgiveness of Allāh, the Magnificent and Generous, (There is none worthy of worship but He!) the Living, the Self-Subsisting, and to Him we repent! We beg His acceptance, forgiveness and guidance. Surely He is the Forgiving, the Compassionate. Pardon us and forgive us

and have mercy upon us. Surely You are the Oft-Relenting, the Compassionate.

My God, O my Lord! My God, O my Lord! My God, O my Lord!

O my Lord, if from my hand, from my tongue, from my eye, from my ear or from any organ of my body, there has issued against You any polytheism, unbelief, disobedience and sin great or small, all these I renounce. I repent. I am sorry.

Now I have come to You for mercy. I seek refuge with Your kindness. I con fess my sins, I repent, I beg pardon, I shed tears. Relent O Lord. Relent and let my repentance mean that I never again rebel against You. I renew my faith. I turn to You for forgiveness. Who will pardon me if You will not? If You dismiss me from the gate of Your Grace, at what door shall I find asylum? Disobedient, I throw myself upon Your Generosity. A sinner, I beg the favor of Your Pardon. You are my bountifully generous King. Accept my repentance. Forgive my offense. For the sake of the honor of Your Beloved, the majesty of the Qur'ān, the might of Islam, the blood of Husayn, the tears of Fātima, the loyalty of Khadīja, the purity of °Ā'isha, the suffering borne by °Alī, the truthfulness of Abū Bakr the Veracious, the justice of °Umar, the modesty of °Uthmān, for the sake of the Ten who were promised Paradise, the simplicity of the homeless Companions, the majesty of the Warriors of Badr, the dignity of the Martyrs of Uhud, the lovers never sleeping, the friends whose hearts are aching, the Martyrs who enshroud themselves in their own blood in the cause of the Divine Word, the scholars whose teachings are applied, and for the sake of the patient poor, look with pardon upon me Your servant. To You I submit, pardon or burn me as You will but make me not distant from You. Let me belong to Your Beloved, enhance me with Your Love, gladden me with Your Pardon, endow me with Your Paradise, honor me with Your Beauty, O my Lord.

I believe in the first of the Messengers, Adam, on him be peace; in the last of them, our Prophet, Your dearly beloved Muhammad, the mercy and grace to all worlds; and in all the Prophets and Messengers who came between these two. I confess this with my tongue and confirm it with my heart.

I believe in Allāh and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and in the Last Day and in Destiny—that good or bad, it is from Allāh, Exalted is He—and in the Resurrection after death.[1]

Grant that our last words may be the Good Sentence: "I testify that there is no god but Allāh and I testify that Muhammad is His Servant and His Messenger."[2] Amen.

For the sake of the Chief of the Messengers, for the sake of the Family of the Cloak,[3] and for the honor and dignity of "There is no god but Allāh."

Glory to Your Lord, the Lord of Honor, beyond description, and peace upon the Messengers and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of All the Worlds.

May my words find their mark. May Allāh grant His approval and may my readers find salvation.

NOTES

[1]āmantu bi-llāhi wa-malā’ikatihi wa-kutubihi wa-rusulihi wa-lyawmi-l’ākhiri wa-bilqadari khayrihi wa-sharrihi mina-llāhi ta°ālā wa-lba°thi ba°da-lmawt

[2]ashhadu an lā ilāha illā-llāh wa-ashhadu anna Muhammadan °abduhu wa-rasūluhu

[3]The Prophet, on him be peace, his daughter the venerable Fātima, his son-in-law the venerable °Alī, and his grandsons the venerable Hasan and Husayn.

THE NINTH DISCOURSE

The Mysteries of Ritual Prayer

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Those who believe and do good works and perform the prayer and pay the zakāh, their reward is with their Lord and no fear shall be on them nor shall they grieve. [2:277].

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PRAYER AS A PILLAR OF FAITH

It is well known to all of us who believe in Allāh and give our hearts to His beloved Messenger Muhammad, that the religion of Islam, the light of Islam, is built upon five fundamental pillars. By way of analogy, let us imagine a lantern with its four glass windows. One side represents prayer, the second fasting, the third zakāh (almsgiving) and the fourth Pilgrimage. The connecting framework consists of truthfulness, loyalty, patience and magnanimity. The top is contentment, the bottom generosity. The light that burns inside is the light of Islam and faith. Thus the lantern sheds radiance and light. It illuminates both itself and its surroundings. But if any one of these elements is omitted the windows turn dark and opaque.

Now let us imagine a house. If there is a light inside, it filters out through the windows of the house and its beams are visible, but if there is no light inside, the house naturally remains in darkness. This house represents man. If we can light the torch of faith in our hearts, the vital point of contact with the Divine, then we shall give forth those expressions of worship most dear to Allāh, namely prayer, fasting, zakāh and pilgrimage, and these lights will bear fruit in the divine qualities known as honesty, loyalty, and patience, as well as a host of attributes beloved of Allāh, admired by the Prophet and amazing to the angels, such as magnanimity, contentment and courage, so

that we shall be exalted above the angels. But if we fail to light the torch of faith in our hearts, then we shall have darkness instead of faith, blasphemy, error, disobedience and sin instead of prayer, obstinacy instead of fasting, perfidy instead of zakāh, lying, calumny and backbiting instead of Pilgrimage, fickleness instead of loyalty, stubbornness instead of patience, meanness and vindictiveness instead of magnanimity, concupiscence and greed in stead of contentment, stinginess instead of generosity; we shall be characterized by these and other such attributes unloved of Allāh. Damned by Him and His angels, we shall live like animals and sink to a level of morality inferior even to theirs.

Of the lantern windows protecting the light of faith, the most important is the act of worship called “ritual prayer”. No act of worship is dearer to Allāh than prayer performed at the proper time. Our Master, the Chief of the Two Worlds, tells us: “Prayer is the light of my eye. Everything has a symbol; prayer is the symbol of Islam and the emblem of faith.” The All-Glorified and Exalted One mentions prayer, and commands us to perform it, eighty-three times in the Holy Qur’ān. More than all other acts of worship, it is prayer that causes Allāh to be pleased with us. Prayer is the exemplary precedent of the Prophet. Prayer is an allegory of the Resurrection. Prayer is what the angels love. Prayer is the light of wisdom, the basis of faith and the reason supplications are answered. Prayer is the cause of the acceptance of good deeds. Prayer is the cause of blessedness in property and lawfulness in earning. Prayer is a weapon against the foe and is hateful to the devil. Prayer is the intercessor between °Azrā’īl and his Master. Prayer is a light in the darkness of the tomb, happiness at the Resurrection, and the cause of being in the shadow of the Throne. At the Resurrection prayer is a crown for the head and a shirt for the back when all are stark naked. Prayer delivers one from the Fire. To your Lord it is the convincing proof. Prayer causes the scale of good to weigh heavy in the balance and insures the safe crossing of the bridge called Sirāt. Prayer is the key to the world. Prayer is the good pleasure of the Beloved. Prayer is our gift from the All-Merciful. Prayer is the pillar of religion.

HOW THE ANGELS PRAY

According to Mu°ādh ibn Jabal and Jābir ibn °Abdillāh, the blessed Messenger said:

“When on the night of the Ascension I reached the first level of Heaven, I saw the angels of the first level standing and making Remembrance. I asked Gabriel: ‘O Gabriel, since when have these angels been remembering Allāh?’ ‘They have been remembering him since they were created,’ he said.

“From there I ascended to the second level of Heaven, where I saw the angels remembering Allāh in a bowing posture. Gabriel informed me that they have been remembering Him in this bowing posture ever since they were created. From there we went up to the third level of Heaven, where I witnessed the angels remembering Allāh in a posture of prostration. I was told that they had been making these prostrations from the time of their creation. It seemed they never raised their heads from prostration and although they did raise them to acknowledge my salutation, they immediately returned to that position. They will remain in prostration until the Resurrection.

“From there I went up to the fourth Heaven where I saw them per forming their devotions on their knees.

“The angels in the fifth Heaven were glorifying Allāh. When I reached the sixth Heaven the angels were worshipping the Lord of All Worlds by declaring His Oneness and Supreme Greatness. The angels of the seventh Heaven were reciting Benedictions. Gabriel told me that they would go on like this from their creation till the Resurrection.

“My heart ardently desired these forms of worship. On account of this longing of mine, my Lord gathered together the various acts of worship performed by the inhabitants of the seven Heavens to form the prayer which He made a religious obligation for my Community in honor of me. Any member of my Community who properly performs these five set prayers will accomplish the worship of the inhabitants of all seven Heavens.” This should encourage believers who perform their prayers, and serve as a warning against slackness and omission.

According to tradition, when he had been created by the All-Glorious One, Gabriel saw how imposing and beautiful he looked, and said: “O my Lord, have you created any angel more beautiful than me?” The Lord of All Worlds and Creator of the Universe replied: “I have created no angel more beautiful than you.’

When the blessed Gabriel had received this answer to his question, he stood up and performed a prayer of two cycles—each cycle taking one thousand years—in gratitude to the Exalted Creator. When he had finished his worship, the Exalted Creator graciously addressed him saying: “O Gabriel, you have truly worshipped Me. No one has worshipped Me like you, but at the end of time a noble Prophet of Mine, My dearly Beloved, will come. Although this Community will be feeble, sinful and not very devout, two cycles of prayer performed by them, for all their absentmindedness, mistakes and forgetfulness, will be dearer to Me than this prayer you have performed for the sake of My Honor and Majesty. O Gabriel, you did your

prayer voluntarily, whereas I shall command them to do it. Their pre-eminence is due to their being the Community of My Beloved."

Gabriel asked again: "O my Lord, what favor will you grant for the prayer they perform?" And the Exalted One replied: "I shall give My Paradise."

Gabriel then repeated: "O Lord, would You give me permission to look around this resort of Paradise You are going to give the Community of Muhammad?" The Lord agreed and so the blessed Gabriel flew off in all his splendor and speed to the resort of Paradise, which he began to inspect.

When the blessed Messenger first saw Gabriel in the sky in his angelic form and witnessed how he filled all the heaven from east to west, he went home in fear to Khadīja. It is mentioned in the history books and in the Sūra of the Qur'ān entitled al-Muzzammil (73) that he said to her: "O Khadīja, wrap me up."

After Gabriel had flown grandly around for three thousand, then for thirty thousand years, he grew weary and alighted in the shade of one of the trees of Paradise. Prostrating himself to Allāh, he begged to know what distance he had covered: "O my Lord, my strength deserted me. Tell me, how much of this Paradise, which You have given to the Community of Muhammad, have 1traversed? Is it half, a third, a quarter?" The Almighty told him in reply: " Even if you flew on for another thirty thousand years at ten times this speed you would not cover one tenth of the bounty I have conferred upon the Community of Muhammad. Such, O Gabriel, is the bounty with which I reward a prayer of two cycles."

WORLDS KNOWN AND UNKNOWN

Astronomers tell us that there are stars in the sky whose rays take seven million years to reach our planet, and there are stars even more remote than that. We may get some idea of the number of the stars when we realize that if we were to assign each person on earth to a separate star, we would run out of people be fore we ran out of stars, and all of these are in the sky of our world.

We were told in the Divine Scriptures that in relation to the heavens this visible universe is in fact no more than a grain of mustard seed. Each heaven is but a mustard seed in relation to the one above it.

Beyond them all lies Sidrat al-Muntahā, the “Ultimate Lotus Tree,” in proportion to which the seventh Heaven itself is no more than a grain of mustard seed. It is this Ultimate Lotus that marks the boundary of the resort of Paradise. The vastness of it baffles the imagination. Yet this is the bounty to be attained by believers who perform the ritual prayer. The Ultimate Lotus is where the blessed Gabriel has his station.

These are the “known” worlds but there are also worlds unknown, or rather known only to Allāh. One day Gabriel was looking at his own splendor and wondering if Allāh had an angel bigger than him. Just at that moment he received the command: “Go to such and such a station and communicate a Divine Command.” When Gabriel arrived at his destination he saw an angel next to whom his own size was barely that of a mosquito. Although he tried to convey the Divine Command, that huge angel said he couldn’t make him out and he told our blessed master Gabriel that he would have to put him carefully inside his ear.

Let us contemplate the Divine Power that created with the command “Be!” all these seven levels of Heaven, the Ultimate Lotus, the even vaster Throne and Seat, the eight Gardens of Paradise, the seven Hells, the seven levels of earth and all worlds known and unknown. Their destruction will be likewise. At a word of command they will be destroyed, then created anew, and our Earth will become a fresh Earth. That day is the Resurrection Day. The dead will be brought to life and driven into the Divine Presence. The victim will be avenged upon the oppressor and everyone will get reward for his deeds good or bad. Do not ask how this will be. Nothing can come about of itself. We may not see who made everything we see, but do we need proof that the maker exists? When Allāh has made all of this without blueprint or model, is He incapable of destroying it all and remaking it, that the second Creation should be based on some model? Allāh has no need of such things.

TRUE GRATITUDE

“Be!” said He, and the world into being came. Were He to say: “Be not!” all would be gone again.

He created us from a drop of water, gave us eyes to see and ears to hear as well as endowing us with the power of reflection, the capacity for understanding. These are hardly things of small account, yet we do belittle them ungratefully. At best, our attitude is very puny. True gratitude for the bounties we have received does not consist in pronouncing the formula “Thanks, O Lord,” for just as saying the word “bread” does not fill the stomach, the expression “thanks O Lord” is a ritual utterance and does not constitute actual gratitude toward Allāh. The body shows its gratitude to Allāh by standing, bowing and prostrating in prayer, by glorifying Him and

proclaiming His Uniqueness and Oneness, by humbling its face in the dust in recognition of its servitude and impotence before the Lord of All Worlds. We show gratitude for the eye we have been given by seeing nothing but the Truth, by looking at everything with a view to learning some lesson. In the case of the ear, gratitude means listening to the word of God and always attending to the cause of speech rather than the speaker, whoever he may be. Gratitude for beauty is shown by preserving one's decency and virtue. For every bounty we receive there is an appropriate expression of gratitude. If it is material, spending it wisely. If it is knowledge, giving teaching and instruction. If it is office and rank, acting with justice and getting restitution for the victim from his oppressor. Unless we demonstrate gratitude in these ways the bounties we receive will prove to be misfortunes. When called to account, we shall have to pay the penalty for our ingratitude and shall end up in Hell.

The Cripple Riding on the Blind Man's Back

The blessed Messenger has likened our situation to that of a cripple riding on a blind man's back. The blind man represents the body, while the cripple represents the soul. All our limbs and members will be plaintiffs one against the other, and against their owner, in the court of the Lord of All Worlds. They will testify to the things we have done. The body will protest: "My Lord, I am not guilty of anything wrong! Had it not been for the soul, what could I have done?" Hearing these mutual complaints, the Lord will ask them: "If a cripple rides on the back of a blind man, and they commit a sin, which of them is guilty?" Receiving the answer that both of them are guilty, He will throw them into the Fire, saying: "In that case, you shall both pay the penalty together. One of you corresponds to the blind man, the other to the cripple, and you committed the sin jointly."

We learn from the noble Companions that our blessed Master gave a broad smile when he told them this …

WORSHIP WITHOUT CHARITY IS UNACCEPTABLE TO ALLĀH

The Blessed Gabriel Tells How He Would Have Worshipped, Had He Been a Human Being

One day the Lord asked Gabriel: “O Gabriel, had I made you a human being, how would you have worshipped Me?” “O Lord,” cried the angel, “all secrets are open to You!” “Yes indeed,” said the Lord, “but let My servants be aware that they do not know what I know.” (Allāh may test one of His servants as a way of informing others.)

Gabriel then went on to say: “I would worship Your Divine Essence in three ways: First, by helping those in poverty. Second, by covering up the guilt of sinners. Thirdly, by quenching the thirst of the thirsty.” The Exalted One said: “It is because I knew this about you that I made you My trusted agent for the transmission of My revelations.”

The Venerable Dhū’l-Nūn Gives Water To a Thirsty Dog

The venerable Dhū’l-Nūn al-Misrī was once going on Pilgrimage. In the desert he saw a dog whose thirst was making him lick the ground. As he had no water with him, he caught up with his caravan calling: “O candidate Pilgrims, this is my seventieth Pilgrimage. I offer the reward of all my seventy Pilgrimages to anyone who gives water to this dog.” Show

compassion to those in this world that Allāh may be compassionate to you also.

A Woman in the Time of Moses Earns Divine Approval

According to the Tradition reported by the noble Imām Muslim, it happened in the time of Moses that a woman was driven out of town because of her wickedness. As she was wandering the desert, she saw a dog going around a well, licking the ground from thirst. The woman dipped her headscarf in the well to make it wet, squeezed it out into her shoe and let the dog drink from it. Sometime later she died and Allāh gave this inspiration to Moses: “In such-and-such a place a friend of Ours has died. Pick up her corpse and perform the funeral prayers for her.”

Moses asked around but no one seemed to know of any friend of Allāh’s having died. “The only death we know of,” they said, “is that of an outcast from the city. The world has been delivered from her evil. We threw her into a hole.” Allāh then revealed: “O Moses, that creature was My friend.” “Alas, my Lord,” said Moses, “Your servants say that she was a bad woman.” But the Lord said: “I am the God of vindication not of vindictiveness. Because she had compassion for one of My creatures and gave water to the dog, I included her among My friends.” If it is like this for one who gives water to a dog, imagine what rewards will be merited by those who quench the thirst of human beings.

THE INVIOLABLE SANCTITY OF CHARITABLE ENDOWMENTS

Harūn al-Rāshīd was one of the greatest of the °Abbāsid Caliphs. His dearly beloved wife Zubayda had water piped to the Ka°ba, where it is still known as Zubayda's water. Seeing her in a dream after she died, a saint asked her: "How has Allāh treated you?" "He has pardoned me," she replied. The saint said: "Of course you are pardoned. You brought water to the Ka°ba. Anyone responsible for such goodness will be pardoned." But Zubayda said: "Not for this did my Lord pardon me. The accomplishment of that good work was no more than my people's right. I have been blessed with pardon for having spent my wealth in good causes." A curse rests upon those who cut off water supplied by the authors of pious endowments and upon those who convert such endowments. When the Resurrection comes they will face the complaints not only of the founders of the endowments but also of all the poor of the community and of wild animals and birds. Compensation will be exacted from these tyrants and their perfidy will earn them the most grievous torment. There will be no one to help them and they will find God's punishment beyond endurance.

Pious foundations cannot be bought, sold, pawned or converted. To do so is a great sin. Accursed is he who buys, sells or converts a pious foundation. In the Muslim world care must be taken of pious foundations beneficial to the believers. We have all seen how those who do not look after such foundations soon go blind or suffer some terrible affliction. Death is no deliverance. For while in this world death is the maximum penalty, in the Hereafter it is the greatest favor for unbelievers. Thus in the final Verse of the Sūra entitled al-Naba' we read: "We have surely warned you of a doom near at hand, a day when a man will look upon what his own hands have sent forth, and the unbeliever will cry: 'Would that I were but dust!' " (78:40) Whether in this world or the next, to be mere dust, to be annihilated, is good fortune compared to living in degradation and torment. But death does not exist in the Hereafter. It is of His grace and generosity that Allāh has told us about this desire of the unbelievers and tyrannical oppressors. Otherwise, He would not even have condescended to tell us about their condition. What value do they have in His sight? Is His Sovereignty in any way impaired by the disbelief of the unbeliever? Or for that matter does our

belief in any way enhance His Glory and Honor? The believer's faith is for himself, his safety and salvation in both domains. Likewise, the infidel's disbelief is for himself. He suffers torment in this world and in the Hereafter, in both worlds degraded and debased.

ATTENTION TO BOTH FORM AND SPIRIT DURING RITUAL PRAYER

The Exalted One tells us: "Woe unto those who, when they perform the prayer, although outwardly meticulous in its proper performance, nevertheless make inadvertent mistakes in these beautiful acts of worship, through preventing that mutual assistance which constitutes the very spirit of prayer." (Interpretation of 107:4-7.)

The inadvertencies referred to here are not simple mistakes in the external aspects of ritual prayer. Did not our blessed Master say, "My Community is relieved of responsibility for inadvertency and mistakes?" It is rather a matter of inner intention. What is eaten accidentally or in a moment of forgetfulness does not invalidate the fast. In this case, the stricture is directed at those who pay meticulous attention to the formalities of ritual prayer, yet perform it heedlessly in that they disregard its spiritual significance.

Each stage in the ritual ablution to remove minor impurities has an inner as well as outer meaning. The mere physical washing of face, arms, head, ears or feet may be done better by unbelievers and tyrants. Inner ablution means, among other things, promising to turn the face only toward Allāh, to use the arms only for purposes pleasing to Him, to crown the head with His commands, not to listen to bad things, and to walk away from evil.

Total ablution to remove major impurity also has its obvious external aspect, but really stands for the cleansing of the inner being. It represents an awareness of the need to purify oneself of envy, hypocrisy and all the filth of this world.

As for covering the private parts, there can of course be no question of hiding anything from Allāh the All-Seeing. What it signifies is that we hide the shame of others as we cover our own. The story of Gabriel taught us the tremendous merit of covering faults.

Turning to face the qibla[1] is certainly a formal obligation in ritual prayer. At the same time, however, the Qur'ān tells us that true piety in the sight of Allāh is not a matter of facing East or West, but of faith in God, the Resurrection, the Angels, the Scriptures and the Prophets.

Spending, i.e., giving your beloved possessions to those you love—to the believers — is another religious duty. This includes attending to the needs of one's relatives, of orphans, of the destitute and of the stranger far from home, as well as the manumission of slaves. Do I hear someone say that slavery no longer exists these days, that it has been abolished? What about those poor wretches who have to work for years and years under some tyrannical individual, unable to get their due, with no escape to freedom, what are they if not slaves?

The external requirement in all these matters is formal correctness; inwardly, however, prayer entails observance of the rights of both God and man, while alms giving means seeing to it that people really get their due.

Imām °Alī was asked: “O Imām, zakāh means giving what percentage of what? What is the rule in Islamic law?” He said in reply: “To those who are mean or stingy, it means giving one fortieth. But to us it means giving everything.” The venerable °Umar gives this report: “On the eve of a battle our Master urged us to disburse. I said to myself: ‘This time I shall surpass Abū Bakr in charity.’ I took half my wealth and presented myself to Allāh’s Messenger. Our Master asked me: How much have you brought, °Umar, and how much have you left at home?’ ‘O Prophet of Allāh,’ I replied, I have brought half, leaving the other half for my children.’ ‘May Allāh accept it,’ said he. Just then, Abū Bakr came into his presence. He also produced his offering and submitted it to the Messenger, who asked him: ‘How much have you brought, Abū Bakr?’ His reply was: ‘I have brought it all, O Messenger of Allāh.’ When our Master asked if he had left nothing for his children, he said: ‘I have left them to Allāh.’ At this, I repented for having once again entered a charity race with Abū Bakr.”

Let us recall one of the teachings of the Qur’ān: one of the noble characteristics of good people is being faithful to their promises, being true to their word. The marks of hypocrisy are three, the hypocrite is a liar, does not tell the truth; he goes back on his promise, does not keep his word; he betrays trust. These are the attributes of the hypocrite. As for the attributes of the believers, Allāh says that they are the ones who patiently endure tribulation and want, through hard ship and affliction, true to their faith in the Beloved, and ever conscious of the Truth.

Thus we see that much more is required of us than merely turning to face the qibla. Similarly, every element of the ritual prayer has a profound inner meaning in addition to its formal, outer aspect:

Timing: just as there is an external obligation to ascertain the right moment for prayer, it is our duty in reality to be aware of the timeliness in all things.

Intention: every prayer must be performed with conscious intention. Intention, indeed, is the universal criterion in Islam. The inner intention is not to lapse or fall back into bad habits one has forsaken.

Takbīr (the initial declaration of God's supremacy): when we say, "God is incomparably Greater than anything we could know or imagine" (Allāhu Akbar!), the inner reality is our awareness of setting aside this world and everything but God, and of entering His presence.

Call to Prayer: the Call to Prayer (adhān) symbolizes the final trump of Isrāfīl, the angel of Resurrection. Hearing this Call and hurrying to the mosque, we symbolically enact our rising from the tomb and gathering for Resurrection. Our arrival at the mosque represents our being assembled at the site.

Standing in rows: when the Muslim congregation forms ranks for prayer, it represents humanity on parade in the presence of Allāh. As we raise our hands and pronounce the opening takbīr, we provide an allegory of people standing to render account to the Almighty.

Bowing posture (rukū°): when we incline the body in humility toward God, it is a simile for confession of sins and entreaty: "O Lord," we are saying, "I declare You devoid of any attribute of deficiency. You are the Magnificent One. Beside Your mercy, my sin is of small account."

Straightening up (qawama): standing erect between bowing and prostration reminds us that our bodies will be restored when we are called to account at the Resurrection.

Prostration (sajda): we fall down twice in humble prostration, sitting up briefly in between, and say as we prostrate ourselves: "O God, the Highest of the High, I declare You devoid of any attribute of deficiency." All this, including our assertion of God's supremacy on sitting up between prostrations, is likewise symbolic of our situation at the Resurrection, when we must face the sins we have committed and obey the divine command to read out our record.

Final Greetings (tahīyāt) and Salutations (salām): when we sit back on our heels at the end of prayer, and offer the Greetings, we come face to face with all we have done, and become aware of the reality of the Fire; turning the head to give the Salutation, first to the right and then to the left, we seem to be casting about in search of someone to act as our intercessor.

Externally, then, we go through a series of movements—standing, bowing, straightening up, prostration, sitting for the greetings and turning the head in salutations—but it is from the inner peace and quiet reverence of the prayer that we gain knowledge of the deeper realities.

When our Master Imām °Alī stood up to pray, he would sometimes blush red and other times turn pale. When the people of his household saw this happening, they asked him: "O Imām, why is it that when you get up to pray you are sometimes scarlet and sometimes deathly pale?" He said in reply: "I am going up into the presence of Allāh. Is that easy?"

Some further points: Since with the opening takbīr one enters the Divine presence, it signifies separation from this world. What is outwardly the first standing position (qiyām) makes the spiritual statement: “O Lord, I shall not stand in the presence of any but You and Your friends.” The bowing posture, which is outwardly an obligatory part of the prayer-cycle, signifies inwardly: “O Lord, I bow to none save You. To Your enemies I make no show of friendship, offer no assistance.” Then we say: “You are the Hearer of the praise of those who praise You,” and make the obligatory outer prostration. One of the secrets of the prayer is to say inwardly, as we go down in the second prostration: “O Lord, I prostrate myself before You alone. I was nothing, You brought me out of the dust, and once again I shall be nothing.”

All that I have said barely scratches the surface of this subject. But what we can conclude is that woe and torment are not for those who pray in this fashion. Woe and torment are the lot of the hypocrite, who prostrates himself before God yet aids God’s enemies, who does not know his true place of worship.

Woe and torment are for those who, as the venerable Mevlana puts it, set their heads down in prostration and stick their buttocks in the air and suppose that to be prayer. Woe and torment because they do not know the true meaning of prayer or of Islam; while they go through the motions of prayer, they also commit all kinds of wickedness, are marked by every defect of character, and perpetrate every crime God has forbidden. Such prayers do not bring them closer to Allāh, on the contrary it is because they take them away from Him that He says in His Noble Book: “Woe and torment to those who perform the prayer … ” Believers should ponder the dreadful fate of those who pray and refuse mutual assistance, and should think how much worse it will be for those of such bad character who do not even pray.

Since we know from another Noble Verse that prayer offers protection against immoral and unlawful behavior, it follows that those who pray, yet do not abstain from such conduct, are only making a show of prayer. Were they to pray as Allāh wishes, their prayer would keep them from everything wicked and unlawful. Consider the bounties conferred upon those who perform prayer as it should be performed. What great good tidings our blessed Master has given those who pray. When the Resurrection dawns and mankind is assembled, the faces of some will be sparkling like stars. When the angels ask them: “What good conduct has brought you to this high degree?” they will say: “As soon as we heard the Call to Prayer in the lower world we would rush to make ablution and enter the presence of Allāh.” There will be others whose faces radiate light as bright as the moon. When they are asked the same question, they will say: “We would already be in a state of ritual purity when we heard the Call to Prayer instituted by Muhammad and, as soon as we heard it we would go to the mosque and enter the presence of our Lord.” The faces of some of the believers will be as radiant as the sun and their explanation will be: “All we earned was by lawful means and all we consumed was lawful. We used to give part of our income to the poor and needy. We would go to the mosque even before the time for prayer and hear the Call inside the mosque. Now our Lord has granted us these high degrees.” There is guidance for us in this good news from the blessed Messenger. It is said that if a Muslim joins the prayer when the Imām gives the opening takbīr, he obtains the merit of a thousand Pilgrimages and a thousand Visitations and receives a reward as if he had distributed a pile of gold the size of Mount Uhud. For each cycle of prayer, he receives as much merit as if he had worshipped his Lord for a whole year. He becomes immune to the Fire and to hypocrisy and sees, even in this world, the place he will occupy in Paradise which he will enter without being called to account. This good news is naturally addressed only to those who serve Allāh truly and perform the prayer.

We have not yet heard all of the good news. The blessed Prophet has also said that if a believer gets up to pray and says: “Allāhu Akbar”, He gives this command to His angels: “Remove the sins of My servant that he may worship Me in purity.” The angels take away his sins and when that servant has completed his prayer, they ask: “O Lord, are we to reload this servant with his sins?” But a Voice from on high will say: “O My angels, it does not befit My generosity that I should re-register the sin I have removed. I have pardoned all his errors.” Consider this good news from our Master: “Believers, any member of my Community who makes ablution with clean and lawful water and joins the prayer behind the Imām is entitled to the mercy of the Lord of Majesty.” The Messenger, on him be blessings and peace, is further reported as saying: “A believer who performs the five set prayers in congregation has five good things to look forward to:

1. Poverty will not afflict him in this world.

2. He will not suffer torment in the tomb.

3. At the Resurrection his record will be handed to him from the right. (Those who receive their records from the right hand side are the people of Paradise. Anyone who receives his record from the left or from behind belongs to the people of the Fire.)

4. He will cross the bridge Sirāt with the speed of lightning.

5. He will enter Paradise without torment or reckoning.”

Our generous and noble Master has given us the following simile: “Just as no dirt remains on a person who bathes five times in a stream flowing in front of his gate, no sin remains in one who enters the presence of the Almighty five times a day, for he enters the Divine Mercy and is granted forgiveness.” If a bottle is stuffed with filth and left in the sea, the sea water will clean the outside of that bottle, but just as the inside of the bottle remains unaffected, so it is with those who purify themselves outwardly but remain dirty within. If you enter this stream five times a day, therefore, be sure to clean yourself inwardly as well as outwardly so that you may be truly worthy of pardon and may see your station in Paradise even while you are in this world.

EXTERNAL ABLUTION AND INNER PURITY

External ablution is purification from physical defilement. It is good order and rectitude. Inner cleanliness, however, means purifying the heart of vanity, arrogance, hypocrisy, envy, irascibility, wordly ambition, greed and lust, as well as unlawful appetites, thoughts and words. It means not letting into the heart anything other than love of God and the Messenger. If you possess this fine character, you need fear no punishment from Allāh. You will enjoy contentment, immune from the fire of poverty, and your body will suffer no torment in the tomb, for in the spiritual symbolism of dreams each person’s body is his own tomb. How great is Allāh’s bounty in this world for those who truly serve Him …

One of Two Fire-Worshipping Brothers Embraces Islam

In the time of the Successors, two Fire-worshipping brothers once held the following conversation: “Our fathers and grandfathers always worshipped fire as we do also. Let us put our hands into this fire that we worship. If it

burns our hands, let us give up worshipping it. A new religion has appeared, so let us find out about it and embrace it. Let us believe in the Prophet who has brought the new religion." They then stuck their hands in the fire, where they got burnt. They then put them into it once more saying: "O Fire, if you are God do not burn our hands." When their hands did get burned again they said: "If this had been our God it would have not burnt our hands," and they set off in search of Islam, following the road that led to the mosque of the Muslims in the city. On the way, the elder brother said to the younger: "I am not going ahead with this. I shall not desert the religion of my fathers." He then turned back, but the younger brother said: "I shall seek the Truth," and he went into the mosque, where he found a place to sit. Just then Mālik ibn Dīnār came to deliver a sermon. The people mingled without distinctions of class, rich be side poor, soldiers beside generals, the ugly next to the good-looking and the healthy next to the sick. The black sat in front of the white, the slave in front of his master and all in an atmosphere of loyal brotherhood. In this mosque the poor were not thrown to the back. Everyone sat knee to knee, listening eagerly to this preacher who gave advice like a tender father. Although the visitor was a Fire-worshipper they said nothing to him but accepted him in their midst and embraced him warmly. All this presented a stark contrast to the place of worship of another religion he had once thought of joining. There the rich and the poor had separate places, the latter standing while the former sat in beautiful chairs. As for the wretched slaves, they suffered all kinds of indignities at their hands. As he thought of unfortunates like these, the beautiful words of that man of faith were bringing him the good news that he stood at the threshold of great good fortune and that a crown was to be placed upon his head. There was no need for further verification, for it was as if he had entered Paradise. W hen the lecture finished, the young man stood up saying: "O ardent scholar, O guide to the way of Truth, I am a Fire-worshipper but I have come to accept the religion of Truth. Offer me faith and Islam." The venerable Mālik ibn Dīnār said: "You must say and believe in your heart: 'God is One, there is no other deity worthy of worship, and Muhammad, may Allāh bless him and give him peace, is His Messenger'."

He then became a believer and monotheist as he pronounced the blessed sentence:

“Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā-illāh wa-ashhadu anna Muhammadan °abduhu wa-rasūluh”

(“I testify that there is no god but God and I testify that Muhammad is His slave and His Messenger.”)

He was then told: “You must believe in Allāh, the angels, the Books of scripture, the Messengers, that Destiny good and bad is from Allāh, and in the truth of Revival after Death.” “I believe, I accept,” said he, “It is all really true.” Next he was told: “My son, you must perform the five set prayers commanded by Allāh. You must keep fast in the month of Ramadān each year. If you are rich, you must give one fortieth of your wealth to the poor and you must make the Pilgrimage in the proper season once in your lifetime.” To this he said: “I accept all this, but I am poor, so how am I to give zakāh and how shall I perform the Pilgrimage?” “When you become rich,” said Mālik ibn Dīnār. “In that case” said he, “I have no reservations.”

The Muslims witnessed this conversation in amazement. Mālik ibn Dīnār said: “At the moment you are poor but we are all brothers now, so let your brothers help you out.” But the young man protested: “Please excuse me, O Imām! Please excuse me if I do not accept the help you offer, for I now have faith in Allāh and have become a believer in Truth. He did not leave me sad and destitute even when I was a polytheist, so He is not likely to deprive me now that I am His servant. Thank you. I am in good health. I shall work and earn my way. That’s how I would prefer it.” Then he set off for home. All he could think about was his wife’s reaction to these developments. What would he do if she took the news badly? He had two

children. What would he do with them if his marriage broke up? As he pondered these thoughts, he prayed: “O Lord, grant faith to my wife’s heart, bring her to Islam and crown her with faith.” When he reached home he went in to find his children at play. When they saw their father, they ran to meet him and he hugged and cuddled them while their mother looked on admiringly. Then they sat down to eat what God had provided. He had performed the night prayer at the mosque, so the time was well advanced. When they had put the children to bed and were ready to lie down themselves, he said: “Let us sit a moment longer, my dear. I have an important matter to discuss with you,” and he told her everything that had happened. “I have become a Muslim,” he said, “What do you say to that?” His prayer had been answered, for his wife heard his adventure with pleasant surprise and said: “If you wish me to embrace Islam then I have become a Muslim too. You are my benefactor, the source of my happiness. I shall never leave you. Wherever you are, I shall be there … . We shall go together to Paradise and to Hell.” He then taught her the things he had learned that day. Together they lovingly pronounced the profession of faith and she became a Muslim too. They then slept till the time for morning prayer, when he awakened his wife for worship before he himself hurried off to the mosque, which is the house of Allāh. He arrived just after the mosque had opened. The muezzin was reciting blessings and peace in an ardent voice while the believers were coming in ones and twos, pronouncing Benedictions and declaring the supremacy and unity of God. Some were washing at the ablution fountain, while others had begun to pray and were prostrating themselves before the Lord of All Worlds. The mosque seemed like Paradise. He gave thanks to his Lord for having let him taste Islam. What a fine thing it was to be a Muslim, he thought as he went inside. Like the other believers, he performed the customary prayer of two cycles before the signal was given for the congregational prayer to begin. They all drew one another’s attention to this, formed themselves into rows and stood with hearts at peace. At least fifty officers would have been needed to arrange so many people in rows. Whereas soldiers, even with officers in charge, would take several minutes to get into line, the Muslims quickly straightened their own ranks. The prayer was performed, Allāh was glorified and supplication was made. Everyone held up his opened palms in supplication to the One Object of Worship. He also made his plea.

When all this was over, he left the mosque and went to the laborers' market, the assembly point for all the workers who offered their services for daily wages. This was where people who needed jobs done found men to do them. He had been going there every day and finding work so as to provide for his children. This time, he went there as usual and waited for a job to come along. It was a day when many people were seeking workers. Everybody else was given a job and sent off to do it, but it seemed as if nobody noticed this man who had newly embraced Islam. Even people he had worked for before, and who had been satisfied with his work, came and chose other men. It was as if they had not seen him and this was, in fact, the case. Eventually the market was deserted. He waited there on his own until the call was given for the noon prayer. When he heard the Call to Prayer, he made his ablution and went to the mosque. After the prayer, he returned to the same place. If only somebody else needed a porter, had a load for him to carry, he would be able to earn enough to feed his children, but in vain he waited and waited. When the afternoon prayer came around, he went into the mosque to discharge his religious duties, then wandered around the market crying: "I am a porter, does no one want anything carried?" but there was no work. The sunset prayer was called, so he made his ablution and went back to the mosque. After the prayer, everyone set off for home. Only he stayed on, waiting. He performed the night prayer before finally heading homewards. There was nothing to eat in the house. What was he going to say? How was he going to satisfy his children? How could he bring himself to speak to them? The children would not understand. When he reached home, the children were already asleep. He had nothing to offer his wife. "Where is the bread? The children have gone to sleep hungry," said she. "My dear wife," said he, "I did not collect my wages from the person I worked for today but, God willing, I shall get the two days' wages tomorrow. If you have done your prayer, let us go to bed." He could not get off to sleep and rushed off to the mosque early in the morning. When he had performed the prayer he went to the laborers' market. Again there was no work for him. He performed the noon, afternoon, sunset and night prayers and spent the rest of the time looking for work without success. Before going home he picked up a few bits of bread that had been left in front of an

eating-house. He found his children in tears, crying: “Bread, bread.” He explained to his wife that he had worked again for the same person as yesterday, but had still not been able to collect his wages. They ate the scraps of bread, then he hugged his children and put them to bed. When morning came, he hastened to the mosque before the Call to Prayer and performed the prayer in congregation. Then he went to the usual place to look for work. Nobody noticed him. Although everybody else got a job, there was none for him. Nobody saw him. Nobody who knew him recognized him. He stood there till noon, getting hungry and exhausted. Hunger was making him black around the eyes. When the noon prayer was called, he went into the mosque and stood in the presence of the Lord. After the prayers he again set about looking for work, but again without success. When afternoon prayer was called, he went again to the mosque and when the prayer was over, he heaved a deep sigh and fell in prostration, weeping profusely as he cried: “O my Lord, You never made me hungry all the time I attributed partners to You. Surely You will not make me die of hunger now that I have become Your servant. Though You make me die of hunger, though You inflict a hundred thousand pains on every organ of my body. I shall never turn my face away from You. I shall never desert my faith in You. You know my heart. This is a test to teach this servant of Yours a lesson. It is your way of showing how dependent I am upon You. But it is my wife I am afraid for, lest her faith be weakened.” He wept and wept. He repented to Allāh for the days when he had attributed partners to Him. He asked for forgiveness (How many of us believers, I wonder, could endure such a test and remain steadfast in faith and true to Islam?). As he made his entreaty through his tears and groans, an angel was instructed to assume human form, take a bag of gold and deliver it to the man’s house. He knocked at the door and when the woman answered, he said to her: “My lady, tell your husband that his Master is very pleased with his work and wishes him to continue with it.” For two days he has not received his wages. You will find them inside this bag.” As soon as he said this he disappeared. The woman opened the bag. The gold it contained was sufficient not only for the rest of their lives, but to bring up the children as well. “What a generous master this is,” she thought in amazement. Not even a king would give such treasure to a man he had employed for two days. What a kind and generous master this one was. Her eyes filled with tears of

joy as she took one piece of gold to the moneychanger. The infidel moneychanger who assayed the quality of the gold had never seen anything like this. It was very pure indeed, unlike any other gold in the world. Inscribed upon it in letters of light was the affirmation of Divine Unity. He turned the gold over and over, then asked: “Where did you find gold like this?” The woman explained that her husband had been working somewhere and that it had been given to him as wages. This infidel was a man learned in heavenly scripture. He told the woman that her husband must come and see him without fail. He cashed the gold for a very large sum and the woman was pleased. Going back home she bought meat and fruit, fed the children and prepared a delicious meal for her husband.

Let us leave her for a moment, impatiently awaiting her husband, and return to the poor man’s side. There he was, weeping in agony. Sunset came and he performed the prayer. Then he stayed in the mosque, listening to the Qur’ān, until the night prayer. After he had performed the night prayer he went out into the street, where he gathered a handful of sand and put it in his handkerchief. He filled another handkerchief with stones and then set off for home. His neighbors were Fire-Worshippers and he could not let them see him coming back empty-handed three days in a row. With the handkerchiefs in his hands he approached the house. The lamp was lit and the children were playing together. The smell of fresh food floated from the house. Unable to make head or tail of this, he stood wondering whether his wife had gone begging. Could she have begged from their relatives, who were hostile to their faith? He entered in a rage, prepared to cause trouble. When his wife greeted him joyfully and the children clung to his legs chirping: “Daddy has come,” he cried with a frown: “Where did you get all these things? Tell me, where did you get them?” and flung the handkerchiefs he was holding behind the door. “What a sin,” said his wife, “Why do you throw the bread and flour on the floor?” as she picked up the bread and tried to sweep up the flour. The man was amazed. He wondered if he was dreaming. That had been sand and stone. But no, the stone were now bread, and fresh and warm too, and the sand had turned to flour, and best quality flour at that. The man could not get over his surprise. Then his wife

started talking: “What good fortune! What a kind master he must be. That person you work for sent his man today to give us your wages and to let you know that he is very pleased with the way you are working for him and has increased your wages so that you will carry on with the job.”

Only now did the man realize what had happened and why the stones had turned to bread, the sand to flour. Praising and extolling Allāh, he said: “O my wife, my dear companion,” and told her everything that had happened to him. He explained to her that his employer was no human being, but Allāh. It was from Him they had received this recompense for their faith. The woman then told him to go and see the infidel moneychanger. When the moneychanger learnt the mystery of this affair, he also believed in God and found salvation in both domains.

THE SPECIAL MERIT OF PRAYER IN CONGREGATION

As far as possible, believers should endeavor to perform the prayer in congregation. For prayer performed in congregation has seventy-seven levels of reward; absent-minded mistakes made during collective prayer are pardoned. In prayer performed individually, on the other hand, only a single reward is received, and the books of Islamic jurisprudence state explicitly that pardon is not granted for shortcomings in its performance. There is also a strong precedent for congregational prayer in the exemplary practice of the Messenger, who warned people not to miss congregational prayer. Believers ought not to abandon this important precedent. Prayer in congregation is a mercy.

A Blind Man is Rewarded For His Prayers in Congregation

There was once a man who, though blind in both eyes, always joined a congregation for prayer. He never abandoned this practice, so dear to Allāh's Messenger. One day, as he was going to the congregational prayers, he fell into a hole and split his head. When he got back home in this sorry state, his wife said to him: "You silly man, your eyes are useless. You are under no obligation to pray in congregation. If only you would perform your prayers at home." But he replied: "Never mind my head, even if my body was broken and scattered, I would not give up following the practice of the Messenger. The eyes in my head may be blind, but not so the eye of my heart!" That very night, the blessed Messenger of Allāh appeared to the blind man in a dream and said to him: "Why were you quarreling with your wife?" "O Messenger of Allāh," he replied, "we were arguing about my following your exemplary practice." Thereupon, the Messenger rubbed the blind man's eyes with his blessed hands and the light of vision was restored to him. When he got up the next morning, he was no longer blind. His eyes could now see. His sight had been restored because of his respect for the noble Prophetic precedent.

SOME PROPHETIC TRADITIONS CONCERNING RITUAL PRAYER

Our Master says:

"Everything has a symbol and the symbol of faith is the ritual prayer."

"The ritual prayer is the light of my eyes."

"The accounting on the Day of Resurrection will begin with the prayer. If this accounting is in order, it will assist acceptance of other good deeds, but

if the accounting of prayer is not in order, matters will be come a little difficult."

"Wrongdoing believers who merit Hell will have their whole bodies burnt by the Fire. Only those organs that make prostration to God will be unaffected. Therefore, perform the prayer with your whole form and heart. .

"If a person performs the night prayer in congregation, he is reckoned as having spent half of that night in worship. If he also performs the early morning prayer in congregation, he is reckoned to have kept vigil the entire night."

"If the prayer a person performs does not keep him from wrongdoing, it means that his prayer takes him away from Allāh."

"Prayer is defective if performed when a meal has just been prepared. This does not apply, however, if there is a risk of missing the proper time for that prayer."[2]

"Prayer is the pillar of the religion. Whoever performs the prayer certainly does his religious duty. Whoever forsakes the prayer, certainly destroys his religious faith."

"The religion of Islam needs its members to congregate and gather together as a source of strength. The need for congregation on the part of Islam itself is even greater than the need for it on the part of the believers for the sake of spiritual reward. The reward for prayer performed in congregation is

twenty-five[3] degrees greater than the merit of prayer performed on one's own."

"Those who wish to dwell in the highest part of Paradise should perform the prayer in congregation."

"If a person does not perform the prayer, it is as if he has not adopted any religion."

"It is prayer that effectively separates the believer from the infidel and polytheist."

"Those who forsake the prayer will find God angry and wrathful towards them when they die, or at the Resurrection."

THE FIVE DAILY PRAYERS

Surely prayer at set times has been enjoined upon the believers. [4:103].

Performance of the five set prayers becomes a religious obligation for every Muslim girl from the age of nine and for every male Muslim from the age of twelve. These prayers are a mighty command from Allāh, Exalted is He. Those who omit to perform them are impious and sinful. Those who deny their obligatory character leave the fold of Islam … For those who say, "I

do not perform the prayer but my heart is pure," the consequences are fearful.

Those who pray enjoy the favor of the Divine promise. The fate of those who do not pray because of their laziness is left to Allāh, Exalted is He. If Allāh wills He may pardon them; or if He wills, He may punish them. For believers who pray, the Divine Good Tidings are a certainty. These most worthy beings will attain the Divine mercy and enter Paradise. Therefore be sure to make up any prayers you did not or could not perform! Beware of underestimating the prayer! For all acts of worship are summed up in the prayer, including those of the inhabitants of Heaven. Do not spend your life without worship! Prayer is the capital investment in the Hereafter.

THE GIFTS WE MUST TAKE WITH US TO THE HEREAFTER

The first person you will meet on your final homeward journey is °Azrā'īl, the blessed Angel of Death. You must take him four presents, namely: the performance of all your missed prayers; your observance not only of basic religious duties, but also of human rights; awareness of your mortality; fear and uncertainty about your fate. The All-Glorious One tells us that the blessed Joseph used to pray: "O Lord, let me die a believer! Include me among the righteous!"

The gifts for your soul are four: eating little, sleeping little, saying little, and being morally upright. If you act in this way, you will save your soul from torment, and it will be satisfied with your supreme gift.

You must also bring gifts to the tomb in which you will lie. While there is still time left to do so, you should prepare these four presents for the tomb: perform the Prayer of Night Vigil; read the Qur'ān; always keep yourself pure; do not tell tales, do not make friends fall out with one another, do not cause mischief. This good behavior will be the gift of your tomb. There are two Inquiring Angels called Munkar and Nakīr, who put the following questions to the dead when they enter the tomb: "Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet? What is your Religion? What is your Book and in what direction do you turn to pray? What are the believers to you?"

You are also required to take gifts to these angels. Their gifts are: to abstain from lying; to put off arrogance and take on humility; to hear God's Word and accept it.

The gifts for the Balance are four: possession of good moral character, practicing the ethics of the Qur'ān and following the example set by the Messenger; not forgetting Allāh but remembering the Lord; abstaining from ostentation and hypocrisy; considering it unworthy to harm any creature and making restitution to those one may have wronged.

The gifts for Sirāt are likewise four in number: avoiding what is unlawful and dubious; suppressing your anger; sticking to the congregation; diligent endeavor in performance of religious commands.

Hell must also have its gifts. The following four presents must be taken there: charitable distribution of your wealth in Allāh's cause; weeping in fear of Allāh; obedience to parents (so long as this does not entail disobedience to Allāh); to give up rebellion against one's parents.

There are also four presents for Paradise: keeping trusts and never betraying them; expenditure in Allāh's cause; self-sacrifice for Allāh's sake; the acquisition of knowledge.

The next four presents are for Allāh's blessed Messenger, loving good deeds and good people for Allāh's sake; disliking bad deeds and bad people for His sake; respect and attention to the learned; affection for the members of Mustafā's household.

The four presents for the Exalted Lord are these: loving performance of obligatory and necessary religious duties; renunciation in fear of Allāh of what is unlawful and forbidden; encouraging people in good and noble works; warning people and preventing them from doing evil.

A man once came to the blessed Prophet and said: "I wish for death, O Messenger of Allāh!" Our Master told him about these gifts, and asked if he had prepared them. "No, I have not," the man replied. "Do not wish for death before you have them ready!" said our Master.

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SPECIAL AND SUPEREROGATORY PRAYERS

The five obligatory set prayers are those performed in the early morning, about noon, in the afternoon, just after sunset and at night. These constitute the most important of the fundamentals of faith for all who call themselves Muslims.

In addition to these, there are special prayers on Friday and for funerals. The former is held at noon on Friday and it is obligatory for every male to perform it in congregation. Although it is not compulsory for a woman to perform this prayer in congregation, if she does so it takes the place of her ordinary noon prayer.

Attendance at funeral prayers is a communal rather than individual obligation. Women may participate. So long as a sufficient number of people perform this prayer it is not obligatory for others to attend.

Other special prayers are those held on the two festivals, that which concludes the fasting during Ramadān and the Feast of Sacrifice in the month of Pilgrimage. Performance of these two prayers is considered necessary.

There are also various supererogatory prayers for every day and night of the week. Our blessed Master has told us of the good fortune and merit to be obtained by those able to perform them.

It is hardly possible for the human mind to conceive what will be granted to those who, without hypocrisy and without looking for recompense, perform the five set prayers, which are a daily obligation, correctly and in congregation, believing in the Exalted Lord, loving Him and giving their hearts to His Most Noble Messenger. Let us serve Him before this precious life slips away, before we drink death’s wine, before we don the unstitched shirt, before we ride the bier and before we enter the darkness of the tomb, so that we may be blessed in both worlds and win the good pleasure of the All-Merciful. To those who perform it, prayer is good fortune; to those who

neglect it, a source of regret. It is the symbol of the believer’s faith. If you perform the prayer, you will not leave yourself in the lurch. One who does not know the Divine Majesty, who does not recognize the Truth, will not lower his head in prostration. Pray! The prayer is your Ascension! The prayer is your remedy for sin!

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and praise be to Allāh, Lord of All the Worlds.

NOTES

[1]Direction of the Ka°ba in Mecca.

[2]It is during Ramadān that this situation most often arises. Ought one to take the iftār (fast-breaking meal) and then perform the sunset prayer, or is the proper thing to do the prayer first and then eat the iftār? This question is raised by many and we would answer it as follows: It all depends on the situation of the person performing the prayer. If his mind would be on food all the time he was praying, then he ought to take the iftār first and pray afterwards. If, on the other hand, he would not be distracted by thought of food, he should break his fast with water or salt and then perform his prayer before taking iftār.

[3]Or, according to one version of this tradition, twenty-seven.

THE TENTH DISCOURSE

The Duties of Parents

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

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The Blessed Messenger befriends a Poor Orphan.

O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are angels harsh and grim who do not refuse Allāh what He bids them but do what they are bidden. [66:6].

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THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

In this Verse of the Holy Qur'ān, the Exalted One cautions us to guard our selves and our families, our wives and our children, against the fire of Hell. He makes it clear that we are answerable to the Lord for ourselves and our children and dependents, just as a provincial governor is responsible to the central government in matters pertaining to his province. We hold in trust our own bodies, our property, our farms and gardens, our shops and offices, and also our children and wives. We shall be called to account to the Almighty for all these bounties entrusted to us by Allāh, the Lord of All Trusts:

Then you shall be questioned on that day concerning the bounty you enjoyed. [102:8].

As human beings, we must call ourselves to account before we face the final reckoning and interrogation. As the blessed Prophet said: "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock."

Children have ten rights over their father, namely:

1. A father owes it to his children to earn by lawful means, to eat lawful food, and to preserve the lawfulness of the seed within his loins.

2. Children are entitled to expect that their father will help them to find a suitable mate when they are of an age to marry.

3. A man must use lawful means to clothe, feed and support the mother of his children.

4. When a child enters this world, the father should recite the Call to Prayer in the baby's right ear, while in the left ear he should pronounce the signal for the start of prayer. He should give the child a beautiful name. When the infant is one week old, the father should sacrifice a sheep, have the baby's head shaved, and distribute the weight of its hair in gold as alms to the poor. He must provide the child with lawful food. In the case of a boy, he must have him circumcised.

5. When a child reaches the age of four years, four months and four days, the father must begin teaching it the Qur'ān, or provide a teacher for the purpose.

6. He must see that the child begins to study.

7. He must teach it a practical skill along with its academic studies.

8. He must pay careful attention to the friendships his children form.

9. From the age of seven, he must carefully ensure that his children become accustomed to performing the prayer and keeping the fast.

And bid your people pray, and persevere in this. [20:132].

10. The father has a duty to ensure that his children find a good and respectable mentor, from whom to learn perfection and wisdom.

The Holy Qur'ān tells us that when a father who has neglected any of these is brought into the Divine Presence, his children will complain of him to the Exalted One, saying: "O Lord, this man who was my father took me from the higher world and, for the sake of his pleasure, caused me to descend to the abode of tribulation. He gave me neither warning nor guidance and is the cause of my everlasting misfortune. Now give him, twice over, the punishment you are going to give me." It tells us that at the Resurrection a father will flee from his own children. Thus Allāh has explained to us the misfortune awaiting at the Resurrection and has graciously told us, in His Holy Qur'ān, to protect ourselves and our families from the Fire and from the severity and harshness of the guardians of Hell.

The Marvelous Exploits of the Venerable Sheikh Vefa

Sheikh Vefa (Arabic: Wafā'), sanctified be his spirit, lived at the time of Mehmet the Conqueror. He was a saint well-known for his holiness and closeness to Allāh. He was outstandingly learned in both the exoteric and esoteric sciences. He is the eponymous founding saint of the Sufi Order known as the Wafā'īya (Turkish: Vefaiye) and an authority on spiritual matters. He compiled the litanies and services of the order. He was one of the great men present at the conquest of Constantinople and it was he who acted as Imām at the funeral prayers for the venerable Conqueror. When the Janissaries rebelled against the appointment of Karamani Mehmet Pasha, whom they sought to kill, Mehmet Pasha took refuge in the convent of the venerable Sheikh. The Janissaries besieged the convent when they heard that the Pasha had gone into hiding there. The biography of Sheikh Vefa records how, when the saint went out and uttered one cry of "Allāh!", every one of the Janissaries present collapsed in a faint, dispersing one-by-one as they recovered their senses. Innumerable miracles are attributed to the saint. For the benefit of the reader who is unfamiliar with them we shall recount a few at this point.

A woman once came to tell the venerable Sheikh that her son was a captive in enemy hands. She entreated him to insure her son's safe return. The venerable Sheikh said to her: "Don't go away lady; sit down. Your son is coming to meet you now." After an hour or so had elapsed, the woman's son came in dressed as a cook, with his sleeves rolled up. "Take your son, lady," said the saint. The woman embraced the boy and mother and son were reunited. To those who asked in amazement what had happened and how he had come there, the young man explained:

"I was taken prisoner and put on sale in the slave market, where a Christian bought me. As his slave, my task was to cook for him in the kitchen. I spent all my time in captivity as a cook. Today my master went hunting and caught a hare. He had just given it to me to cook when a black cat appeared in the kitchen, snatched the hare out of my hand and began to make off with it. I gave chase to retrieve the hare and while I was trying to catch the cat I

found myself here be cause the cat came in here with the hare in its mouth." And, lo and behold, the black cat was sitting at the Sheikh's feet and the hare lay on the ground.

When he witnessed this divine bounty and miraculous display of saintly charisma, he praised and extolled Allāh, entered the service of the Sheikh and attained his goal in this world and the Here after. He came to be known as Esir Bey ("Sir Captive") and now sleeps the eternal sleep within the Sheikh's convent, while his soul roams the gardens of Paradise. As for the Sheikh's cat, it has its own special tomb at the entrance to its Master's mausoleum.

In the Sura of the Holy Qur'ān entitled al-Naml, Allāh mentions that in the time it takes to blink an eye, the venerable Solomon's governor, Āsaf, son of Barkhīya, brought the throne of Bilqīs all the way from the Yemen to Jerusalem, a journey which normally took three months. If the intimates of the venerable Solomon, Prophet of the Israelites, could bring the throne of Bilqīs so far in the blink of an eye, who could consider such a little miracle too much for the intimates of the blessed Messenger, who is the Chief of the Prophets and a Mercy to All Worlds?

We believe in the miracles of the saints of the Children of Israel, for we know about them from the Holy Qur'ān. If the saints of the Israelites could bring the dead back to life by divine leave, and to fetch the throne of Bilqīs could make a three month's journey in the twinkling of an eye, you will not need me to convince you of the powers of a saint of God's Dearly Beloved. It should be understood, however, that the miracles wrought by the Prophet and the charismatic exploits of the saints of Allāh are not of their own doing, they being but the instruments of their Lord.

We should not suppose such little miracles to be beyond the intimates of the venerable Beloved of the Almighty. And let us not forget that the charisma and dignity of a saint belongs to that Prophet whose follower he is.

To return to our story:

The venerable Sheikh Vefa had a baby boy. When the child was old enough to go out and play, he used to watch out for the water-carriers as they went down the street; he would pierce their waterskins with a nail he carried, then put his mouth to the hole and drink the water that spurted out.[1] (At that time, Istanbul did not yet have its forty fountains; the water for these was piped to Istanbul by Sultan Suleyman Khan, known in the West as Suleyman the Magnificent, who took part in twenty-seven campaigns, conquered Rhodes and Hungary for the Tlirks and laid siege to Vienna.) Considerations of respect and polite ness prevented the water-carriers from telling the child's father about his naughtiness. How could they mention it to the Sheikh, when Allāh's blessed Messenger had said: "The child is the father's secret self?"

After some months had gone by, one of the water-carriers could no longer tolerate the boy's bad behavior, so he went to complain to his father, the venerable Sheikh. The venerable Vefa, may Allāh sanctify his secret being, inquired how long his son had been spiking the waterbags and the complainant told him that he had been doing so ever since he went out to play in the street. The venerable Sheikh thereupon invited into his presence all the water-carriers whose bags had been pierced and provided them all with new waterskins. Having set things to rights with them all, he said to them: "I shall correct my child. Do not feel bad about it. This naughtiness of his comes either from me or from his mother. There is no wickedness in the child himself." Thus he appeased the water-carriers. Then he called his wife to him and she said: "I swear that I have not knowingly set aside any

of Allāh's commands or committed anything He has told us not to do. There is just this one thing; while I was pregnant I once went to visit our next door neighbor. When, for some reason, the neighbor had to leave the room where we were sitting, my eye was caught by a lemon lying on the sideboard. I was ashamed of my desire so, in order to take the edge off it, I stuck a needle into the lemon and put a drop of the juice in my mouth." On hearing this the venerable Sheikh heaved a sigh of relief saying: "Praise be to Allāh, the sickness is finally diagnosed." So you see that if a mother takes an illicit pin-prick of lemon, her child ends up sticking a nail into waterskins and drinking the water. The saint instructed his wife to set things straight with the neighbor, so she went and told her what she had done and that she wished to clear the matter up. The neighbor accepted her apology, saying: "It would not have mattered if you had eaten the lemon." The venerable Sheikh did not even feel it necessary to summon his child and warn him not to make holes in the skins of the water-carriers. The very next day, the child was busy scratching the ground with his nail and when the water-carriers went by he did not even look at them, let alone interfere with their waterskins.

The disobedience and naughtiness of our children are actually manifestations of the parents' own sinfulness. There are a few cases where this cannot apply, but it is true ninety-nine percent of the time. If Allāh wills, He can produce just offspring from a tyrant or a tyrant from a just man. He is wise in His decrees and able to dispose of His Dominion as He wishes. As things are, parents must watch over their children with the greatest care and avoid anything unlawful. They must be obedient to Allāh and those who are great in His sight so that their children, also, will avoid what is forbidden and be equally obedient to the Prophet and those who are great in the sight of Allāh. Leaving aside the actual commission of unlawful things on their part, parents may even impede that spiritual development of their children by doing things which, though permissible, are not consistent with true piety. For example, according to the Sacred Law, a mother may give milk or food to her child even though she is in a state of ritual impurity, necessitating major ablution. Mothers who wish their children to

make good spiritual progress should not avail themselves of this concession, but make their ablution before suckling or feeding. These things have an influence on the child's moral character. In short, parents must pay diligent attention to their offspring both spiritually and materially so their children may prosper in this world and the Hereafter.

Two Brothers and Their Mother

The venerable Yazijioghlu Mehmet Efendi is the author of a book called Muhammadīya (Turkish: Muhammadiye). He was an eminent contemporary of the venerable saint Hajji Bayram. In his book he relates the things desirable and acceptable in the sight of the blessed Messenger. This work brings good fortune and blessedness to any house in which it is kept. It is popular knowledge that in the home of any Turkish Muslim one can normally find the Holy Qur'ān, the Mevlidi Sherif and the Muhammadiye.[2]

Yazijioghlu is the surname of two brothers, Mehmet and Ahmed Bijan. The venerable Mehmet Efendi is buried at Gallipoli, where his illumined tomb is still visited. Ahmed Bijan Efendi translated a book called Anwāru-l°Āshiqīn from Persian to Turkish. Now this Ahmed Bijan Efendi was lecturing in the noble mosque one day, giving instruction to the people, when his elder brother Mehmet Efendi came in and listened for a while. He then left the mosque smiling, as his younger brother was not too preoccupied to notice. When Ahmed Bijan Efendi got home that night, he told his mother what had happened and asked her to find out what had made his elder brother smile at him like that. When Mehmet Efendi came home, he answered his mother's request for an explanation by saying: "My dear and respected mother, I was not smiling at the way my brother was teaching. As he was giving his lecture, so many angels came to hear him that they left one another no room to sit; the angels were treading on each

other! To see the angels crowding each other out in their effort to hear the teaching of a human being, pleased me so greatly that I could not help smiling." Ahmed Efendi was deeply moved when his mother relayed this to him. He asked her to enquire of his elder brother why it should be that, while Mehmet Efendi had reached the level where he could see the angels, he himself was denied this privilege. When their mother put this question to him, Mehmet Efendi said: "Mother, you must seek this deficiency in yourself."

After some reflection, their mother said: "I never gave you milk unless I had made my ablution. But once, when Ahmed was still a baby in swaddling clothes, a lady neighbor came to call. I got up to pray, fearing that the time for prayer was almost past. Ahmed started crying, and I noticed the lady giving him milk to keep him quiet. I almost broke my prayer. But it was already too late to do anything; my Ahmed had drunk the neighbor's milk. I asked her whether or not she was in a state of ritual purity, and she told me she was not." "Well, mother dear," said Mehmet Efendi, "there you have the reason why my brother does not see the angels."

If parenthood was merely a matter of bringing a child into the world, we would no different from the animals. When the male animal feels a natural urge, he finds a female of the species, does his paternal duty and then withdraws from the scene. If this is our sole responsibility toward our children, where do we differ from the beasts?

ANIMAL AND HUMAN PARENTHOOD

Even animals prepare their young for life in this world, by teaching them how to hunt for themselves, protect themselves and fight off their enemies.

Those who merely teach their children about life in this world, giving them no instruction concerning the Hereafter, Allāh, the Messenger and the duties of religion, are just like these animals. Those who teach their children and families nothing about either world are even lower than animals. Since animals have no share in the Hereafter, but are destined to live only in this world, they discharge their duties completely. They simply fulfill their obligations as parents, without expecting any benefit from their young.

As for ourselves, we look to our children to help us, care for us and give us obedience. Let us ask ourselves what we could do for our children in exchange for this good behavior we expect from them. Might it be that we owe them something in return for these great expectations?

When parents do not fulfill their obligations toward their children they deserve it, in a sense, if the latter mistreat them. Such bad treatment is nothing compared to the torment they will suffer when the Resurrection comes. What our natural parents fail to teach us about how to be human, we learn, however, from our father on the spiritual path, the venerable Glory of the Universe, and from our religious fathers, who are heirs to his knowledge and state. They teach us the rights of parents, and because they remind us that our father and mother are the cause of our once-only entry into this world, and inform us of our religious duty to pay them all legitimate obedience in return for the secretions they provided for us by natural impulse, the majority of us do still obey them, look after them and behave toward them as children should. It is well known to the people of all four Scriptures that the taking of human life is the greatest sin of all. So parents who fail to teach their children about this world and the Hereafter are guilty of just such a heinous offense.

Those who do not teach their children about this world and the Hereafter are guilty of a sin even worse than killing them. For parents who do kill their child in infancy deprive it only of this world, leaving it to prosper in the Hereafter. But parents who teach their children neither of this world nor of Allāh and His Messenger, not only condemn them to degradation, misfortune and abasement in this world, they also bar them from eternal life in the Hereafter and slay them everlastingly.

The Son Who Bit Off His Mother's Tongue

A mother had a son. One day, when he was a child, he brought an egg home and gave it to his mother, who was naturally pleased that her boy had started looking after her at such an early age. She did not ask where he had come by the egg, but told him he had done well. As time went by, the child stole first a chicken, then geese, turkeys, goats, sheep, cows and oxen, until he became a brigand. His mother always happily accepted the stolen goods he brought her, and expressed her approval each time. Eventually he needed no encouragement. Crime had become a way of life for this villain. At one time he used to steal when no one was looking, but now he took by force, killing those who refused to hand over. He had become a thorn in the side of the authorities and a scourge to the public. Like all such rogues, he was finally caught by the forces of the law and put on trial. Their verdict was given and he was sentenced to death. He was immediately handed over to the executioner. The mother, who was the cause of his downfall, had now come to witness through her tears the death of her son. It was because of her that he was to be hanged, yet when they asked him if he had a last wish, he said: "My final wish is to kiss my mother's tongue." His mother was brought to him so that he might realize this wish. "Mother," said he, "I must leave you now; stick out your tongue for me to kiss it." When she did what he asked, he made as if to kiss but then bit off his mother's tongue at the root. Streaming with blood, the woman started mumbling: "What have you done, you murdering rascal? You have committed a sin even as you are about to die." But he said: "Far from being a sin, what I have just done is

perhaps the best deed of my life. For that tongue has led me here to the scaffold and caused my degradation in this world and my frustration in the Hereafter. Tongues like that are better cut out. When I was little I brought my mother a stolen egg; if, instead of pampering me, she had made me tell her where the egg came from, and had set me on the right path, I would not be where I am now—at the gallows. I would have been an honorable man, comfortably situated, with Paradise rather than Hell to look forward to in the Hereafter." These were his last words before they hanged him.

Even if children cannot always bite off in this world the tongues of parents who fail to teach them about life, and so bring misfortune upon them, they will certainly do so in the Hereafter. Parents have a duty to give their children good names. Names are important. As they say in Arabic: al-asmā'yanzilu mina-s-samā'. (Names come down from heaven.) If we name our children after Prophets, saints and righteous people, we not only express our love and gratitude toward the original bearers of the names, but also hope and pray that—by Allāh's grace and generosity—our offspring may inherit their good character and conduct.

Of course, experience shows that a good name does not automatically guarantee goodness in the bearer. In my humble opinion, it all depends on the motive with which the name is given.

The blessed Messenger said: "When the Resurrection comes, the Glorified and Exalted Lord will favor with His divine pardon those named Ahmad and Muhammad, on account of His great love for these names."

It is also incumbent upon parents to teach their children to perform the ritual prayer, and as much of the Qur'ān as possible. This is a major obligation toward one's children. When a child reaches the age of four

years, four months and fourteen (or ten) days, it should be sent to religious classes. Prayer becomes obligatory from the age of puberty. Without being able to recite from the Qur'ān, one cannot perform the prayer, since Qur'ānic recitation is an integral part of it. Although this does not apply to the deaf or dumb, they are still obliged to perform the movements of the prayer, and their parents must see to it that they do so, just like normal children. Instruction in the prayer begins at the age of seven. Parents have a duty to insist that their children pray from the age of nine, in the case of girls, and twelve in the case of boys. Parents who fail in this duty are shamed in the presence of Allāh, will be called to account for themselves and will certainly be driven into the Fire. We know this from the Traditions.

I consider it profitable to explain to you here how great a reward in the sight of Allāh will be obtained by parents who teach their children the Qur'ān. Reading the Qur'ān is the most meritorious act of worship. For the Messenger says: "At the Resurrection there is no greater intercessor than the Holy Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is the great intercession. Neither angel nor Prophet nor any other is capable of such intercession."

It is likewise with the complaint of the Holy Qur'ān. Just as by its intercession it brings its reader to salvation, so by its complaint it has a person driven into the Fire. The Chief of the Universe says; "If a person learns to recite the Qur'ān, yet regards the office and wealth given to any other as being above the Qur'ān that has been given to himself, for thinking like this he is reckoned as having belittled the Word which Allāh has magnified. In the sight of Allāh, there is no bounty more excellent, mightier and greater than the Holy Qur'ān, which is His Word."

Mu°ādh ibn Jabal once heard the Messenger say: "At the Resurrection, the Exalted One will say to the people of the Qur'ān: 'Let those who are My people come!' Calling them thus, He will crown them with diadems

splendidly adorned with red rubies. Then He will ask a person radiant as with the rays of the sun: ‘O Memorizer of the Qur’ān, are you content?’ When he replies, ‘I am content, O Lord, I am content,’ the recording angels will plead: ‘O Lord, grant yet more to this servant of Yours!’ The Exalted Lord will give the command, and this memorizer of the Qur’ān will be clad in the raiment of Paradise. Then the All- Glorious One will ask him again if he is content. That person will say that he is indeed content, but the angels will again plead that he be given more. Allāh will then say: ‘Open your right hand!’ Filling the open hand with contentment, He will say: ‘I am content with you. Are you content with Me?’ When he says: ‘I am indeed content,’ the angels will again implore the Lord to give His servant yet more. The Exalted One will then bestow upon him a light as bright as the sun, before telling the angels to escort him to Paradise. They will lead him to Paradise with seventy thousand angels in attendance. They will award him one level of Paradise for every letter of the Qur’ān, each level so wide that it would take a century to traverse it. The angels will tell the recipient of this divine bounty to recite the Qur’ān. As he begins his recitation, they will take wing.

“Flying fast when he recites quickly, and slowly when he recites slowly, the angels will alight upon a lofty palace of white pearl. The gates of that palace will be too many to count. Each gate will be of burnished gold. Before each gate will stretch a garden, in each garden there will be all kinds of trees, and on every tree all manner of fruit. All kinds of streams will flow through the palace gardens, each stream bordered with pavilions and mansions housing houries and servants. He will receive such bounties as human eye never saw, human ear never heard of, and human imagination could not conceive.

“The angels will visit the Qur’ān reciter, bearing gifts and conveying Allāh’s greetings. As they are honoring him in this manner the Exalted Lord will give the command: ‘Fetch the parents of this Qur’ān reciter!’ His parents will be brought and presented with half of what is being conferred

upon their son. They will give praise to Allāh, saying: ‘O Lord, we are not worthy of these bounties. Why are You doing us this favor! We did no good work to merit these bounties and marvels.’ But the angels will tell them: ‘This divine favor has been granted to you for having taught your child to recite the Qur’ān.’ ”

Our blessed Master, the Messenger of Allāh, said: “The parents of children who read the Qur’ān, should they die and face the torment of the tomb, will be spared that torment by the grace of the Qur’ān recited by their children.”

Hudhayfa ibn °Ānī relates the following from Allāh’s Messenger: “Allāh does not afflict a people whose children recite al-Fātiha in school.” He added: “In honor of the Qur’ān recited by children who recite al-Fātiha, Allāh, Glorified is He, dispels torment from a people for forty years.”

RESPECT FOR THE TEACHER. IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION, BOTH RELIGIOUS AND PRACTICAL.

Attention must be paid, however, to the rights of the teacher. Obedience, respect and good treatment are due to the latter on the understanding that the teacher’s right is even greater than that of the parents.

Ibn °Abbās reports our Master, the blessed Messenger, as saying: “Anyone who learns the Qur’ān by heart and then forgets it will be raised tongueless on the Day of Resurrection. The sins of my Community were paraded before me and I saw no sin greater than that of forgetting the Qur’ān!” When a child has been taught the Qur’ān, it is the parents’ duty to teach it the rudiments of religion, major and minor ablution, compulsory and

necessary duties, the basis of faith, the fundamentals of Islam, customary and supererogatory duties and what is lawful and unlawful. Children who display a talent for learning should be sent to one of the great centers of learning to be trained as leaders of nation and community. As for those who are not interested in study, parents have a responsibility to apprentice them to a righteous person from whom they can learn a craft. Care must be taken not to put them in the hands of the wrong type of person. The craft they are to learn must be an acceptable one. If a child picks up bad habits from being entrusted to the wrong hands, the equal of any sin it commits will be recorded against its parents. It is most incumbent upon parents not to get their children into jobs like selling shrouds, serving in coffee shops, collecting garbage or other inferior types of work. They must see that their children get good jobs working with people of wholesome morality. Crafts considered acceptable by scholars and saints include: agriculture, motor and electrical mechanics, ironwork, cabinetmaking, shoemaking, weaving, animal husbandry, captainship, fishing and mining.

Some four months after birth, a child says: ‘Lā ilāha illā-llāh’ (there is no god but Allāh). At four months it can make the supplication: “O Lord, pardon my mother and father.” This is the meaning of a baby’s cries. Parents ought not to get worried when their baby cries. It is said that no tears accompany such crying because it is actually a form of glorification. According to the Traditions, parents will not be called to account for their children if, when they begin to speak, they teach them to say: ‘Lā ilāha illā-llāh Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh’ seven times and to recite the Throne Verse and the end of Sūrat al-Hashr.

Against a father who disowns his own child knowing it to be his, Allāh records as many sins as there are stars in the sky and leaves and fruit on the trees, and at the Resurrection He abases and disgraces him.

EARLY MARRIAGE IS RECOMMENDED

Parents who do not marry off their children when they reach marriageable age carry half the burden of sin incurred by those children on account of their passions. It is a commandment of the blessed Messenger of Allāh that we should find virtuous partners for our children when they reach marriageable age.

CHILDREN MUST BE TREATED GENTLY

We should not be ill-tempered with our children but always smiling, soft-spoken, and tender towards them.

A Man Who Cursed His Child and Parents Who Prayed For Their Son

Someone once came to the venerable °Abdullāh al-Mubārak and complained about his child. °Abdullāh al-Mubārak asked the man whether he had cursed his child. He replied that he had. “Then why do you complain about him?” said °Abdullāh, “It seems you have done wrong by cursing your child.” We should always wish our children well. The prayer of parents for their children is like the prayer of the blessed Prophet for his Community. Even if they should be disobedient, we must pray to the Lord of All Worlds for their improvement.

A family in Trebizond (Turkish: Trabzon) had a very wicked child. He used to come home drunk every night, disturbing the whole neighborhood with his loud curses. When his parents saw him in this condition they were so

shaken with fright that they could not say anything to him about his bad behavior. One night, this rebellious son came home while his mother and father were making a prayer, which he happened to hear. This was the supplication his mother and father were making:

“O Lord, reform our son and transform his bad habits into good ones. For the sake of Your Beloved, make him one of the pious.” When he heard his parents praying like this, their rogue of a son burst into tears and threw himself on their mercy, begging to be forgiven. From that moment on, he did not merely give up his wicked ways but actually turned into a pious person. It is Allāh who brings about a change of heart. Cursing is not good. Far from cursing our own children, we should even beg Allāh to reform our enemies.

As you know, faith came to the venerable °Umar ibn al-Khattāb because the blessed Messenger prayed that he might be honored with faith. It was through this supplication of the Prophet that the venerable °Umar was blessed with Islam. Supplication has clearly been effective in causing a number of rebels to settle down, and in reforming many bad individuals.

It is necessary for us to treat our daughters even more tenderly than our sons. When we bring something home for our children, Islamic etiquette demands that we give first to the girls and only then to the boys. A girl child is a blessing for the home. Some people have been known to be disappointed in their wives for giving birth to a girl. Such conduct is unbefitting. We should pray to the Lord that our children of either sex should be good. This is always the way, everything should be at its best. Just as we show care and tenderness towards our own children, one of the highest commands of our religion is that we show the same care, love and tenderness toward orphans, who are children of the state. It is incumbent upon us to teach fatherless and motherless orphans the Holy Qur’ān, proper

conduct and good morals; to see that they learn a trade and that they are brought up to be true human beings and useful citizens and members of society. Moreover, by what we do for them out of kindness, humanity and compassion, we gain divine approval both in this world and in the Next. The blessed Messenger has informed us that anyone who strokes the head of an orphan will be forgiven for as many sins as the hairs he touches, and will be credited with a good deed for every single hair. We earn the good pleasure of the Messenger by seeing to the upbringing of fatherless and motherless children, by protecting their virtue and by taking them under our wing. For the Messenger himself was left a fatherless orphan, and to please such an orphan is to please him.

He says in one of his Noble Traditions: “Anyone who protects an orphan and insures his welfare, be that orphan related to him or not, will be as close to me in Paradise as these two fingers of mine are close together.”

Those unwilling to give such protection and who hold orphans in contempt should remember that they must soon die. Their own dear children will then be fatherless. They once had parents to love and caress them. They should try now to win divine approval. Before they leave this guest house, before death overtakes them, they should wipe away the tears of orphans, for the day will come when they will shed many tears and they will need someone to dry their eyes and those of their sobbing children. Let us follow the lead of our Master, the Chief of the Universe. Let us treat orphans as he treated them. Let us earn the approval of Allāh and His Messenger and achieve even in this world the bounties of Paradise.

The Blessed Messenger Befriends a Poor Orphan

Anas ibn Mālik tells the following story: “It was a day of festival. We had gone to the mosque with the blessed Messenger of Allāh, and were returning to our houses. The children were in a festive mood, playing and chirping like birds. Our noble Master, who loved children very much, spent some time watching their merriment. One child, however, was standing there sadly, observing the other children at play with no trace of joy or pleasure in his face. The Messenger of Allāh went up to this child and saluted him. He asked him why he was not playing like the other children. The poor child replied: ‘My Master, today is their festival, these are their happy days. For them, it is indeed a holiday, for they have mothers and fathers, but I have no one. My father fell a martyr in battle. My mother remarried and my stepfather does not look after me, but leaves me out in the street. If I had my own father I too would now be enjoying the holidays. But what does the festival mean to me! For the destitute, what makes a festival is finding bread to eat, clothes to wear and shoes for one’s feet. But with my father gone, my stomach empty, my feet bare and nothing on my back, how can I play!’ The noble Messenger of Allāh could not hold back his tears, which streamed down onto his blessed beard. How could it not be so when the lofty Throne was shaken by this orphan’s lament, and the sublime Pedestal became unsteady! What could he do but weep at this state of affairs, that tender being so kind and compassionate, who was sent as a mercy to the eighteen thousand worlds! It was enough to bring tears to the eyes of anyone with compassion, tenderness and faith in his heart. Stroking the child’s hair, the blessed Prophet said: ‘Would you like from now on to have as your father the Messenger of Allāh; as your mother, °Ā’isha; as your sister, Fātima; as your brother-in-law, Haydar the Valiant Lion; and for brothers, Hasan and Husayn, the youngsters of Paradise!’ The child clasped our Master’s hand saying: ‘Are you Allāh’s blessed Messenger, Muhammad?’ Our Master then took him by the hand and led him to his blessed abode.” Such is the example set by the Messenger, for the community of Muhammad to follow.

O Lord, grant us Your Divine Guidance. Make us parents who fulfill their religious and civic duty towards their children. Bestow good children on

those of us who are childless. Improve things for those who do have children, but rebellious ones. For those of us who have good children, let our children flourish. Bestow Your pardon upon our mothers and fathers. Deliver us by Your grace from the fire of Hell. Ennoble us with Your Paradise and Your Beauty. For the sake of the Chief of the Messengers …

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and praise be to Allāh, Lord of All the Worlds.

NOTES

[1]Waterskins are made of the tanned hide of animals whose flesh it is lawful to eat.

[2]The Turkish Sufi, Ismail Hakki Bursavi, wrote a Qur'ān commentary (in Arabic), entitled Rūhu-l Bayān, which has been printed in many Muslim countries and is still read to this day, as it will be read till the Resurrection comes. This worthy person also wrote a commentary on the Muhammadiye. It is a very important work.

THE ELEVENTH DISCOURSE

Self-Sacrifice

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Surely We have given you Abundance; so pray to your Lord and sacrifice. Surely he that hates you, he is the one cut off. [108:1-3].

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INTERPRETATION OF SŪRAT AL-KAWTHAR

In studying chapters and verses of the Qur’ān we look for the occasion of revelation, while in the case of the noble Traditions we consider the reason for their transmission. The following has been handed down to us concerning the reason for the revelation of this Sūra, entitled al-Kawthar [Abundance], which is the shortest chapter in the whole of the Noble Qur’ān:

A certain °Ās ibn Wā°il once met the blessed Messenger at the gate of the Sacred Mosque, where they held a conversation. When the Prophet left, °Ās ibn Wā°il went inside the mosque, where the polytheists present asked him whom he had been talking to at the gate. “I spoke to the one cut off,” said he. When the Messenger came to hear of this, he was most distressed, for “the one cut off” was the name given by the Arabs to a man who either had no male children or whose male offspring had all died.

Our Master had seven children, three boys and four girls. Six of them were from the venerable Khadija, while his son Ibrāhīm was born of a slave-girl called Māriya, who had been presented to him by Muqawqis, the king of Egypt. All but one of these children passed to the world of divine beauty

during the lifetime of our Master; he was survived only by the venerable Fātima, who passed to the eternal world six months after him.

Since our Master’s son Ibrāhīm had passed to the Hereafter, preceded by two infant half-brothers called Qāsim and Tayyib, the Prophet was left with no male children. For this reason the unbelievers had begun to use the expression “the one cut off” in referring to the blessed Messenger.

Now °Ās ibn Wā°il had also directed this expression at our Master. The noble heart of the Prophet was saddened when he heard this coarse insult. It weighed on him as he came to his felicitous abode, but at that moment this blessed Sūra was revealed.

We can do no more than try to give a true interpretation of the meaning of this Sūra, for of Allāh’s bounty toward us we can relate only a mere drop from the ocean, an atom from the sun. If all the seas were ink, if all the trees were pens, if heaven and earth were paper and notebooks and if men and angels were scribes, the seas would run dry, the pens would wear out, heaven and earth would be covered with writing, angels and men would be tired to exhaustion, yet the meaning of the word of Allāh would not be completely spelled out. Therefore, let us not suppose that the full meaning of this shortest of the Sūras can be truly explained by this or any other interpretation that has been given. Let us not imagine that its significance has been exhausted by what our minds have been able to comprehend, for the interpretation of this Sūra is no more exhausted by what is understood and written about it, than are the edible bounties of the world exhausted by the filling of our bellies. May Allāh grant His assistance to us all. May He let us share in the experience of His Prophets and saints. Amen, in honor of the Chief of the Messengers.

I seek refuge with Allāh as I begin my interpretation: The Arabic word innā means We, the Almighty. That is, the One who creates you from a drop of liquid, brings you to life, causes you to die, keeps you alive, lets you eat and drink, makes you see, hear and walk. The Owner, Possessor and Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who gives whatever He wishes to whomever He wishes and takes whatever He wishes from whomever He wishes. I, your Lord.

The Arabic word a°tāynaka means: “to you, My beloved, My Messenger, I have given—upon you I have bestowed—al-kawthar; abundance. In other words, I have endowed you with all good things: the best of the community, the Qur’ān, Paradise, the river Kawthar, knowledge, action and honor. I have exalted your name. I have caused your name to be mentioned together with My Own in the five daily calls to prayer. I have caused your name to be remembered together with My Own in the testimony of faith and in the affirmation of divine Unity. I have caused you to be characterized by My Own attributes. I have remembered you through the affirmation of the Unity of My actions. I have favored you through the affirmation of the Unity of My attributes. I have had you named along with the affirmation of the Unity of My essence. I have given you the praiseworthy station. I have conferred upon you the station of My most great intercession. I have proclaimed that obedience to you is obedience to Me. I have chosen you as My Own dearly beloved. I have given you your dear daughter Fātima so that, through her, you will come to have progeny on the face of the earth more numerous than any other can claim. Whether in this world or the next, no other name will be mentioned more often than yours. I have sent you as a mercy to all worlds. You are the fount of mercy. You are the only one to open to mankind the gate of the way that leads to Me. Those who come to you, come to Me. Those who pass through your door, enter My presence. Through you I am found, meaning that whoever finds you, has found Me. Along with My angels I pronounce your blessings. I have mercy upon all who bless you. Those who remember you, I also remember, immersing them in My pardon and forgiveness. Therefore, in gratitude for all these bounties which I have given you, through your station of servanthood

which is the highest of all degrees, perform the ritual prayer by standing, reciting the Qur'ān, offering supplication, bowing, glorification and prostration.

Fa-salli li-rabbika wa-nhar! "Most beloved of My servants! Perform for My sake a prayer which I accept as an expression of gratitude for the bounties I have given you, and make sacrifice! Display your service to Me with your blessed body and soul and also through the bounties I have bestowed upon you! Expend your property and expend yourself! Sacrifice your goods and your life in My cause!"

The words inna shāni'aka huwa-l'abtar mean: "in truth, he who calls you cut off is himself the one cut off. For, since he who so offended you also offended Me, I shall multiply your progeny and I shall cut off at the root this man who says that you are without issue. He is the one cut off. He is the one without issue." And so it came to pass. Those who called our Master "cut off," were themselves the ones cut off.

Since, in every century, there are four hundred and fifty million Muslims on this earth, the Sayyids and Sharifs[1] among them are innumerable. As for °Ās ibn Wā°il and his mates, they were cut off and their progeny disappeared from the face of the earth. To spit into the wind is to spit in one's own face.

The descendants of our Master through his beloved daughter, Fātima, have gone on multiplying. Our honored mother, Fātima, was dearly, very, very dearly loved by our Master. According to the noble tradition transmitted by Abū Hurayra from °Ā'isha, the blessed Prophet said: "Fātima is a part of me."

When Fātima came into his blessed presence, our Master would get up to meet her at the door, hug her to his breast and kiss her on the brow, while she would clasp his hands and kiss them over and over again. One day the Messenger said something in Fātima's ear and she began to weep; then he said something else which cheered her up and made her happy again. When asked about this, she explained: "My dear daddy said to me: 'I shall soon be going to the Lord.' This news made me very sad and I wept, but then he added: Of all of the people of my household, you will be the first to join me.' and this made me glad." So it actually came to pass. Six months after our Master had gone to the world of Divine Beauty, the venerable Fātima also passed on to the Hereafter.

THE PASSING TO THE WORLD OF DIVINE BEAUTY OF THE VENERABLE FĀTIMA, THE "BEST OF WOMEN"

After our Master had honored the world of the Hereafter, Fātima would neither eat nor drink and she forgot all laughter and joy. She had an apartment built for her in which she stayed by night and day, weeping her heart out for her beloved father.

She passed the time sobbing and sighing and nothing could take away her grief. As soon as she had done her household chores and taken care of her husband, °Alī, and their lambs, Hasan and Husayn, she would continue weeping: "O my beloved daddy! To whom have you left your Fātima?" Six months went by in this fashion till Fātima got so thin that there was nothing left of her but skin and bones. One night she was weeping as usual when she heard a voice outside calling: "O beloved daughter of the Messenger of Allāh! O daughter of the Messenger!" Peering out, she realized that the voice she had heard calling her was that of a camel named °Adbā', which

once belonged to our Master but had fled from Medina after his death. Our Master's departure had been more than this camel could endure and, in its bewilderment, it had fled to the mountains and desert. Some days it would come to Medina and stare through the gate of the Prophet's mosque at the prayer-niche of the Messenger, but when it failed to see our Master, it would bellow, rub its face on the ground, then shed tears as it ran off again into the desert.

Now, this camel had come to the door of the venerable Fātima and was saying in articulate language: "O daughter of the Messenger of Allāh! May the peace of Allāh be upon you. Since your father left this world, I have been forbidden to eat or drink. My yearning for the Messenger has grown ever stronger. I have decided to go soon to the other world, to the side of the Messenger of Allāh. Have you any orders?" Weeping copiously, Fātima embraced the camel's neck and kissed its eyes as she said: "O °Adbā', salute my father. His Fātima, the light of his eye, can no longer bear this separation. I want you to tell him to take me to his side!" Replying: "Welcome, on my head be it!" °Adbā' nuzzled Fātima's feet then left her and went to the Prophet's mosque. It looked at the Prophet's prayer-niche, then gave a bellow and dashed its head against the rocks.

The following night Fātima saw our Master in the world of dreams, where he greeted her with: "O Fātima, light of my eyes! I long to see you; I am yearning for you. Tomorrow you shall come to me!" In the morning she stood happily in the presence of the Almighty to perform her prayer, then she washed and combed the honored Imām Hasan and the martyr-to-be Imām Husayn, and dressed them in new clothes. She cleaned the house of °Alī the Elect. When Imām °Alī came home he was astonished to see how happy his wife was. He asked her the reason for her joy, but Fātima gave no reply. She made a meal and they ate together, "O Fātima," said °Alī the Elect, "Speak to me for the sake of Allāh! Never have I seen you so happy since the departure of the Messenger. What is it; what is going on?" Fātima now replied: "O Water-bearer of Kawthar and Victor of Khaybar! O my

husband, we shall meet again at the Resurrection. I dreamt of a journey; last night 1 saw my beloved father. He called me to his side and today I am taking leave of you. I ask you to discharge me of my obligations and I commit my Hasan and my Husayn to the care, first of Allāh, then of you. Look after them well! Treat them kindly! Do not tell them that I am no longer there! O °Alī, I am twice an orphan, having lost my mother and then my beloved father. Remember me, and offer a prayer for me when you look upon the lonely and the orphans of this world." On hearing these words from the venerable Batūl[2], Imām °Alī could not hold back his tears. He wept: "O beloved of the Messenger of Allāh, please do not complain of me to your father. I have failed to treat you as you deserved. I was poor and could not make you happy. Do not hold it against me!" Then he embraced her with tender longing and they both wept. The noble Hasan and Husayn joined in this tearful parting. After the noon prayer, Fātima fell sick. Calling the Chosen Imām to her side, she gave her final instructions: "O °Alī," she said, "fetch me that chest over there … " The venerable °Alī did as she asked. Then the venerable daughter of the Messenger opened the chest and took from its wrapping a green satin edict, the writing on which was of light. "O °Alī," said she, "Put this edict in with my shroud. Do you know what it is? When I was to be given to you in marriage, I did not accept the dower of four hundred dirhams. I prayed that my dower might be an intercession on the coming Day of Resurrection for the sinners of this community, and this was accepted by the Exalted Lord. This divine edict is the proof of my having received the right of intercession on behalf of the sinners of this Community. Place it in my shroud, so that I may later produce it in the presence of the Almighty." Then she continued her instructions: "You are to take me to my father's tomb, saying: 'O Messenger of Allāh, we bring you your dear Fātima, the light of your eyes.' You are then to act upon whatever response you may receive." A moment later, the triumphant soul of the venerable Fātima had soared to the World on High, in compliance with the divine command: "Return!" [irji°ī].[3]

The people of the Prophet's household were plunged in a sea of pain and sorrow; their sighing and sobbing made the angels in heaven weep. The

whole of Medina was shedding tears of blood. She, whom the King of Messengers had called a part of himself, was leaving the transitory world to honor the world of perpetuity, leaving the entire Community motherless. The only person happy at this parting was Fātima herself, who was joining her beloved father.

Imām °Alī personally washed and enshrouded her body, putting the divine edict in with her shroud. He carried out the funeral ceremonies in accordance with the instructions of the venerable Batūl. The washing and enshrouding of his wife was the prerogative of Imām °Alī alone.[4]

After performing the funeral prayer, the venerable °Alī came to the tomb of the Messenger. He set down the bier of the venerable Fātima at the gate of the tomb and called inside: “O Messenger of Allāh, I bring you your beloved daughter Fātima!” It is related that when he spoke these words the Prophet’s tomb split open, two blessed hands emerged from within and a voice was heard to reply: “Bring her to me, my Fātima, the light of my eye, the joy of my heart!” Then those hands embraced the venerable Fātima and drew her within. She was returned a moment later and they buried her in the cemetery known as the Garden of the Grove [jannat al-baqī°]. There she lies to this day. May Allāh grant us the lawful means to visit or revisit her tomb.

THE SUPREME EXAMPLE OF SELF-SACRIFICE: ABRAHAM AND ISHMAEL

To continue the Interpretation of the verse: “The way to acknowledge these riches, this divine bounty, is by performing ritual prayer and by giving of yourself. Offer yourself to Me in sincere devotion with body, soul and all you possess. I am your Lord and the Lord of your Community. You are my dear friend. You are my beloved. Make sacrifice! Prayer, fasting and

sacrifice bring you close to me. My faithful friend, Ibrāhīm, offered his life for My sake. My enemy, Nimrod, cast him into the fiery furnace. But We turned the fire into a rose garden. For those who fall into the fire on Our behalf, fire becomes light. Fire does not burn except with Our consent. Those who worship outward forms suppose that fire burns of itself. That was what Nimrod thought. But fire is only a secondary cause of burning. I am the true First Cause. Water does not drown, nor does a knife cut. Water, knives, all things in this world and the Hereafter are but secondary causes. I am the true First Cause. What I say comes to be. As for those who are blind, who neither see nor know Me, they are aware of secondary causes, but the First Cause they do not know.

"Such people are like dogs; if you throw a stone at a dog, it will go and bite not you, the thrower, but the stone you threw. It is therefore the wise, in whom the eye of the heart is open, who know Me. Be fortune good or bad, they know it is from me. They say: 'the good part and the bad alike are from Allāh, Exalted is He.'[5] Whatever good is done, is done with My assistance. Whenever evil occurs, the sinner bears the burden of it himself and, although he knows that it is from Me, he says: 'I deserved to have this sin, this offense, occur through me.'

"The idolatrous Nimrod, unaware of these secrets, threw My friend into the fire. My friend saw this as a blessing in disguise. This was indeed a complete test, a divine model for those who claim to be friends of Allāh. Through this test, Allāh taught His beloved the measure of his friendship for his friend and at the same time showed the heedless an example of the secrets that lie between two friends."

Nor do life and possessions sacrificed in the cause of Allāh, for the sake of one's friend, go unrewarded, as is made plain by the following glorious Verse:

You have fulfilled the purpose of the dream.

See how we recompense those who do good. [37:105]

The venerable Abraham was put to the ultimate test and he passed that test. When it was over, he sacrificed for the sake of Allāh a thousand rams, three hundred oxen and a hundred camels. People were amazed at this, the very angels were astonished, but the venerable Abraham said: “What is there in this to be surprised at? We have offered our life and possessions. To whom do life and property belong? If Allāh were to give me a son, I would sacrifice him, too, for the sake of the truth.” You call yourself a believer, though you do not worship the truth and are disobedient to Allāh. Could you sacrifice for His sake so much as one finger, let alone your life? Could you sacrifice for his sake one single chicken, let alone the thousands of beasts slaughtered by God’s friend, the Prophet Abraham? You look up a hundred references and try to get a legal opinion to justify not making sacrifice. While you give up hundreds of dollars on the orders of Satan, when it comes to giving alms you go checking with religious teachers and lawyers to see if you can get out of it.

Even if you cannot follow the example of Abraham, the special friend of God, who vowed to sacrifice his own son for the sake of Allāh, could you not give Him something from the wealth He has given you? Whatever you do for the sake of Allāh, you will recover ten to one in the Hereafter which is very near at hand. Perhaps the ratio will be even higher than that …

You can find the reward for this not only in the Hereafter, but also in this world. As the blessed Prophet said: “Charity dispels affliction and prolongs

life.”

A Serpent Chained by an Act of Charity

In one of the pre-Islamic communities a young man once got married. The Prophet of that people, who performed the wedding, told his companions that this young man was to die that very night. Next morning, the bridegroom came to worship in the mosque, to the astonishment of those present who had heard from their Prophet that this young man was about to die. Seeing his people fall into doubt, the Prophet asked the young man whether he had put away his mattress: “No, Prophet of Allāh,” he replied, “I am going to sleep a little longer.” The Prophet then turned to his companions and said: “Come along with me!” whereupon they all went together to the young man’s house. He told the young man to put away his mattress and when he picked it up, they saw a poisonous snake lying coiled there. The Prophet addressed the snake, saying: “What are you doing here? Why did you come here?” and all his companions heard the snake reply: “I was sent here to bite this young man, but I was bound with an iron chain. Try as I might to do my duty, I could not manage to escape from the chain and give the young man a lethal bite.” After this, the venerable Prophet turned again to the bridegroom with the question: “What good have you done?” When he replied: “I gave a measure of milk in charity to a beggar who came to my door in the night,” the Prophet said: “You see, that charitable act repelled this affliction from you.”

The same story is also attributed to our Master. But even if it was another of the Prophets, he still counts as our Messenger, because we Muslims believe in all the Prophets. The important thing is the relevance of the story. When that young bridegroom gave his alms he did so purely to please Allāh. See how great was his reward even in this world. What, I wonder, will be the fate of those who respond stingily to Allāh’s glorious command:

“Sacrifice!”? Our royal Master says: “Those who do not offer due and proper sacrifice are not to enter our mosque!” What a dire warning!

When people were amazed at Abraham for sacrificing a thousand rams, three hundred oxen and a hundred camels, he retorted: “There is nothing surprising about this. We are sacrificing our goods for our Lord, for whom we sacrifice our life. Life is more valuable than goods. Moreover, whose goods are we sacrificing to whom? Do these goods belong to me, do your goods belong to you? Surely the sole owner of goods and property is Allāh. This being so, it should occasion no surprise if I sacrifice to their real owner the goods given to us in trust for our provision. Let alone goods and property, for the sake of my Generous Lord I would even sacrifice my own son, if Allāh were to grant me one.”

The true believer should take careful note of this. Someone may claim to be the friend of Allāh, but is he capable of making such sacrifices for His sake? If so, he is as good as his word. Even if that person is not at the level of the Prophet Abraham, in that he could not bring himself to sacrifice his life and his own son, he ought, at least, to expend in the cause of Allāh the wealth which does not really belong to him at all. That is to say, he ought to pay the zakāh. He should bring joy to the needy by making sacrificial slaughter and giving alms. He should perform charitable acts that will wipe away the tears from the eyes of orphans and salve the wounds of the lonely and the down-and-out. Anyone who not only does not perform such acts, but calls them meaningless and ridicules those believers who faithfully carry out these divine commands, that person is not even human, let alone a friend of Allāh.

The Prophet Abraham would certainly carry out the vow he made to his Lord. In order to demonstrate to us, as an example, the stature of His friend, the Exalted One subjected him to a new test. To verify his promise: “If I had

a son I would sacrifice even him for the sake of the truth," He gave him a male child. Allāh tells us: "My friend Abraham prayed to Us:

'My Lord, grant me [a son], one of the righteous,' [37:100]

and We replied:

'So we gave him the good news of a gentle boy.'" [37:101]

A few years later, a radiant son was born to the venerable Abraham from the Lady Hagar. This child was the venerable Ishmael.

The Arabic adjective halīm, [translated "gentle" in the Qur'ānic verse above], is not usually applied to children. As we shall see, however, God's use of this adjective to describe the venerable Ishmael indicated that he would not rebel against his father when the divine command came, but would display docility and obedience. Ishmael was a Prophet. Moreover, as well as being a great human being, he was a mature and accomplished scholar. We do not use the word scholar, however, in the sense of one who reads piles of books even when very young. A scholar in the true sense is a person aware of the divine mysteries, who is able to distinguish good from bad and who knows that the way of Allāh is the only way that leads mankind to salvation. No one deserves to be described as a scholar unless he perceives and fully understands that he cannot achieve true salvation except by acquiescing unconditionally and without qualification to everything commanded by Allāh, the Lord and Master of all things, the All-Powerful and Self-Subsisting, as well as by avoiding unconditionally and

without qualification, that is, in total submissiveness, everything He has forbidden.

Even as a child, the Prophet Ishmael, son of the Prophet Abraham, was just such a scholar. A learned person is definitely no scholar if he lacks the knowledge we discussed above, i.e., the knowledge of Allāh, even if he has read or written all the books in the world and used as much ink as there is in the ocean. Indeed, it profits him nothing to have read or written all these books. As explained by the Qur'ān, there is no difference between such people and a donkey with a pile of books loaded on its back. They are in fact at an even lower level.

The poor donkey is a creature useful to mankind, whereas the existence of that unbeliever who considers himself a scholar is worse than useless, in view of the great damage he may cause by leading people astray.

A gentle and learned child, the Prophet Ishmael eventually reached the age of seven. The Prophet Abraham was now inseparable from his son. He took him along wherever he traveled, praising the Lord unceasingly and experienced all the joys of fatherhood as he observed his son's fine character, good behavior and filial piety, heard him discussing important questions like a great scholar, and saw that he really was a righteous son and a gentle child with a docile nature.

Then one night in a dream the venerable Abraham received this divine com mand from the Almighty Lord who is the Owner and Possessor of heaven and earth and all that is between: "Abraham, fulfill your vow!" When he said: "My Lord, what is my vow?" he heard the words: "You once said: 'If I had a son I would sacrifice even him for the sake of Allāh.' You were given

a son and he has grown up. The time has now come for you to fulfill your promise!”

The night of this dream was the eighth night of Dhūl Hijja.[6] The day that follows it is called yawm al-tarwiya [the day of contemplation], for on this day the Prophet Abraham sank deep in contemplation and remembered that he had indeed said these very words and made this promise. He would undoubtedly carry out his vow without hesitation, that is to say, he would sacrifice his little son Ishmael, the light of his eye, the delight of his heart. He had just been waiting for the divine command.

He wondered whether the command he had received: “Sacrifice your son,” was intended figuratively or whether he was ordered literally to cut the throat of Ishmael. He wanted to understand. If he was absolutely under orders to slaughter Ishmael, this was something no previous Prophet or Messenger had been commanded to do. Besides, Ishmael possessed the light of Muhammad, the ultimate Prophet and the mercy to the eighteen thousand worlds.

He finally reached the following decision: He would take for sacrifice one hundred of the fattest camels and make supplication to the Lord who is the Most Merciful of the Merciful, imploring Him to accept this as a substitute for Ishmael. He acted accordingly, whereupon a fire came down from the sky and consumed the hundred camels. In those days sacrifice was not made by slaughtering. The offerings were brought to the place of sacrifice and left there until fire came down from heaven and burned those that were accepted. Sacrifice by means of the slaughtering knife was unknown until the Prophet Abraham was commanded to do it.

That day, the venerable Abraham waited patiently. In his dream the following night he again received the command: “Carry out your vow!” The next morning, the day of °Arafa, the venerable Abraham once again sacrificed a hundred camels as a substitute for Ishmael and their acceptance was again indicated when fire descended from heaven and consumed them. So another day went by. Then the next night came, i.e., the night between the ninth and tenth of Dhū’l Hijja, and the same command, “Carry out your vow!” was once more delivered to the Prophet Abraham in a dream. He realized at last that his son must actually be sacrificed. When he woke in the morning, the first day of the festival, Abraham, on him be peace, said to his revered wife, the venerable Hagar: “Come, Hagar, wash Ishmael, comb his hair and dress him in his new clothes. Put perfumes on him and make him look nice, because I am going to visit my friend and I shall take Ishmael with me.” Hagar washed the venerable Ishmael and combed his hair. She made him wear his new clothes and perfumed him. What a handsome sight was Ishmael that day. There was something quite special about him. He talked so nicely with his mother, gladdening her heart.

The venerable Abraham took Ishmael by the hand and they set off together. Abraham also took with him a rope and a knife as they made their way to a place called Minā. Ishmael kept running on in front of his father, hopping and skipping before him as they went. Sometimes he would turn around to ask his father something, then they proceeded on their way. The venerable Ishmael was so different today, in such high spirits. The Prophet Abraham had received the order: “Carry out your vow!” three days ago, but he had been obliged to postpone its execution till now. Emboldened by this, Iblīs approached the Prophet Abraham, pointed to the radiant child who was hopping and skipping on ahead, and said: “Abraham, how will you bring yourself to slaughter this innocent child? How are you going to bind him with that rope in your hand, then slit his throat with that knife? Does he mean nothing to you, this laughing, playing child?” The true Prophet, the special friend of Allāh, addressed these words to Iblīs in reply: “O Iblīs, you who have been banished from the mercy of Allāh! Everything you say is perfectly logical, for it is true that only a beast could sacrifice this innocent

creature by pressing the knife to his throat, but I have received this command from Allāh, the All-Knowing and All-Aware, the Almighty Lord of all the worlds, who knows everything much better than anyone and is aware of all things." On hearing these words, Iblīs fled from that place.

When Iblīs at first failed to get the venerable Adam to eat from the forbidden tree, for reasons best known to Allāh he eventually succeeded by means of our mother, the venerable Eve.

Hoping to play the same trick on the venerable Hagar, the Devil said: "How can you sit there? The Prophet Abraham is taking your son to the slaughter. Can such a thing be allowed to happen?" But the venerable Hagar turned him away with the words: "Shut up, you liar! Is it conceivable that a father would slaughter his own son?" Iblīs then tried again: "What about the rope and knife? Why did he take them along? He is going to sacrifice the boy because he imagines that Allāh has commanded him to do it. Run and save your son." The Devil's impudence made the venerable Hagar furious and she exclaimed: "Be off with you, accursed one! My husband is a Prophet. The commands he receives are right and true. He is capable of distinguishing truth from falsehood. Like my son, I would also sacrifice my life in response to this command."

Last of all, it occurred to Iblīs that he might be able to deceive a mere child and get him to disobey, so he ran up to the Prophet Ishmael and said: "Do you know where your father is taking you? Have you not noticed that he is carrying a rope and knife? You just go on playing, but your father is going to tie you up and slit your throat!" The venerable Ishmael snapped back at him: "Be off with you, you devil! When was a father ever known to cut his own son's throat? Besides, my father is a Prophet. How could he deliberately cut the throat of his own son, knowing him to be a Prophet also?" "But he imagines he has been commanded by Allāh," Iblīs at once

replied. The venerable Ishmael then said to him: “Now you are really talking nonsense. How can one talk of a Prophet ‘imagining’ that a command has come from Allāh? If such a command has come, it must be right and true. There is no question of imagining. Therefore, if such a command has reached my father, I am ready to play my part.” The Devil was taken aback on getting such unexpected answers from the venerable Ishmael, whom he had supposed he could deceive. Unaware of what he was bringing upon himself, he decided to try one last trick, so he said to the Prophet Ishmael: “Let us suppose the command your father has received is true. Does that mean that you will really offer your neck?” But before he had time to finish, the venerable Ishmael started to get angry with the Devil’s impertinence, saying: “If such a command exists, my father is quite capable of carrying it out. Nor am I one to disobey this command. If every atom of me is an Ishmael, let each of them be sacrificed for the sake of my Lord! Now, what do you say?” He picked up a stone from the ground, flung it right in the eye of the cursed Iblīs and blinded him in that eye. [Satan had appeared to the three of them in human form.]

Satan beat a retreat, his eye blinded by the stone from the venerable Ishmael. After they had walked a little further, Abraham said: “Let’s pause a moment, Ishmael.” Ishmael stopped. They sat by a large rock. The venerable Abraham started to talk, explaining why they had come to this desolate place:

‘My dear son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. So look, what do you think?’ [37:102]

Even if the venerable Ishmael had not been willing to be sacrificed, the Prophet Abraham was still under orders to sacrifice him. He was certainly going to carry out this command. For his own sake, also, it was necessary

for him to understand this decree of Allāh. Only in that way would merit be acquired.

This is the venerable Ishmael's response to his father's inquiry, as mentioned by Allāh in the Qur'ān:

'My father, do as you are bidden; you will find me, if Allāh wills, one of the steadfast.' [37:103]

When the venerable Abraham heard these words, he praised and extolled Allāh. This was indeed the gentle and learned son Allāh had granted him in answer to his prayer. It was apparent from all his actions and all his words, even at a tender age, that he was a Prophet and a Prophet's son. He said: "My dear and respected father, I have some advice to offer you before you execute this important command. Tie my hands and feet tightly, lest in my mortal agony I should hurt you, for to hurt you would be the same as to hurt God. My second piece of advice is this: When you come to sacrifice me, turn my face towards the ground and apply the knife to the back of my neck. It might happen that, if you saw my face, your hand would tremble and you would be unable to wield the knife; in that case you would not behave properly toward your Friend. Tuck up your robe so that my blood does not splatter it. I do not wish the reward I shall receive from Allāh to be deficient in any of the virtues. It would sadden my mother if she were afterwards to see the stains of this blood of mine upon your clothes. Do not show her my grave, either, for the sight of it would also make her sad. Sharpen your knife well, so that when you press it in to cut my throat, I may not feel the pangs of death too keenly. Take my clothes to my mother as a keepsake, so that when she pines for me she may find consolation in looking at my shirt and recalling me as she nuzzles it. Give my salutation to my mother. Tell her to endure with patience the command of Allāh, but do not tell her how you sacrificed me, dear father. Do not take children of my

age to our house for my mother to see. That would renew her grief. Nor should you, my dear father, look at children of my age. If you happen to see them, do not weep, do not be sad. If you or my mother were to be sad, if you should weep, you would cause my soul much grief."

When the venerable Abraham had listened sadly to these moving, innocent, yet heart-rending words of his child, he said to him: "What a helper you have been to me in carrying out the command of Allāh, my son, the light of my eyes!" Then he could contain himself no longer and wept.

When the venerable Ishmael said imploringly: "Come my dear father, what are you waiting for, carry out the command you have been given," the venerable Abraham tried to bind his son's hands, but Ishmael said: "Father, do not tie my hands. Those who see me later may say that Ishmael disobeyed the command of Allāh and so his father had to tie his hands. Those who rebel are tied hand and foot, whereas I am one of those who patiently obey." Abraham laid Ishmael down and performed two cycles of ritual prayer. Weeping, he raised his blessed hands in completely reverential supplication.

So when they had both submitted their wills, and he had laid him down upon his forehead, We called to him: 'O Abraham … ' [37:103-104]

He said: "O Fulfiller of all needs! O Answerer of prayers! O Lord of beauty and majesty, Most Generous of the most generous! O my Lord! Of Your grace and kindness, have pity and compassion for my old age, look with tender mercy on the condition of this innocent and sinless boy!" Then he took the knife and was aiming it at the neck of the Prophet Ishmael, when the Glorified and Exalted Lord removed the veil of mysteries from all the angels of heaven and earth. When they saw that Abraham, for the Lord's

sake, had laid Ishmael down for sacrifice and was applying the knife with all his might to the neck of his son, they all prostrated themselves at once. The Exalted One said: “My angels! Did you see? Abraham, My special friend, did not shrink from sacrificing his own son in obedience to My command. Did you see My Ishmael? He did not shrink from sacrificing his own life to please Me.” The angels wept and fell in prostration, saying: “Our Lord! Your servant Abraham is truly worthy to be Your special friend, while Ishmael, on him be peace, is truly obedient and compliant to Your exalted command, a servant of Yours who accepts Your decree. You are the Most Merciful of the merciful.”

Although Abraham pressed the knife to Ishmael’s throat to slit it, the knife did not cut the tender flesh. Amazed at this, he sharpened the knife and tried again. Still it would not cut. Again and again he tried, but to no avail! Far from cutting, he had not made even a mark on Ishmael’s throat. How could this be? Getting angry, he struck the knife against a rock and the rock split in two. More bewildered than ever, the Prophet Abraham said to himself: “Rock it will cut, but not soft flesh. How can this be?” At that very moment, the knife was endowed with speech by Allāh, the All-Capable, the Self-Subsisting who has power over all things, who creates man from a drop of liquid, then brings him into human shape, giving him a mind and the power of speech. The knife said: “O special friend of Allāh! You want to cut, but it is my Lord who enables knives to cut, fire to burn and water to drown, and He tells me not to cut. Was Nimrod’s fiery furnace able to burn you? How can I cut unless I am given permission? I am incapable of cutting so much as one strand of his hair, let alone his throat.” As the Prophet Abraham stood dumbfounded in the face of this amazing, divine mystery, the venerable Ishmael said: “My dear father! As you were putting the knife to my throat, I mentioned the name of Allāh. You should likewise proclaim His supreme greatness, then strike with the knife!” Abraham repeated: “Allāhu Akbar,” and as he was pressing the knife to Ishmael’s throat, the sound of “Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar,’’ was heard coming from heaven. This was the voice of Gabriel, on him be peace.

Summoning Gabriel from Paradise, Allāh had created a ram as a substitute sacrifice for Ishmael, then commanded Gabriel to take it to Abraham. The angel had now appeared in the heavens, bearing that ram and proclaiming the Supreme Greatness of God. When Abraham heard the voice of Gabriel, calling: “Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar,” he realized that his trial was over, and in grateful reponse, he glorified and extolled his Lord with the words: “lā ilāha illā-llāhu wa-llāhu akbar.”[7] The venerable Ishmael lay there listening to these utterances, and he also realized that the mercy of the All-Compassionate and Beneficient had come over flowing. Crying: “Allāhu akbar wa-lillāhi-lhamd,”[8] He joined in the glorification and praise. Then Allāh, Glorified and Exalted is He, deigned to address His special friend Abraham with the following words:

“Now you have fulfilled the dream. Thus do We reward the good. This was indeed an obvious test. We redeemed him with a momentous sacrifice; and We left to him, among later generations: ‘Peace upon Abraham!’ Thus do We reward the good.”[9] [37:105-110]

Gabriel declared: “Abraham, greetings to you from the Lord of Heaven and Earth. He has sent this ram as a substitute for the one and only Ishmael. He says: ‘Let him slaughter this offering in place of his son, for I am pleased with them both.’ ” Father and son were filled with joy and happiness at having received the divine grace, the favor of the Lord and the approval of the Maker, so they slaughtered the ram with the declared intention of pleasing Allāh. The impeccable conduct of these two in “friendship with Allāh and obedience to the divine command” has thus been presented by Allāh to us, His servants, with the declaration: “Any one who does not shrink from sacrificing his life and wealth for My sake, like Abraham and Ishmael, may rightly speak of My friendship.”

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SACRIFICIAL SLAUGHTER AS A RELIGIOUS DUTY FOR MUSLIMS (at the Feast following Pilgrimage)

The blessed Prophet said: “He who does not make due and proper sacrifice is not of us.” To be liable to offer sacrifice, i.e. to have a religious duty to do so, a person must have money to the value of twenty mithqāl of gold.[10] Sacrificial slaughter becomes an obligation for every settled Muslim who possesses the equivalent of this amount, whether in goods or in paper currency. A further condition is that he shall have owned this money for a whole year prior to the time of sacrifice.

Consider this noble Tradition: “Whoever prays with us and sacrifices with us, he is one of us. Whoever does not pray with us, and does not sacrifice, is not of us.” Naturally, sacrificial slaughter is a duty only for those of whom it is due and proper. For one who is poor, only prayer is necessary; he has no duty to sacrifice. According to another noble Tradition: “The good of my Community make sacrificial slaughter. As for the bad, the wicked of my Community, they do not offer sacrifice even when due and proper.”

According to a Tradition related by the venerable Anas, the blessed Messenger said: “When the believers are raised from their tombs on the Day of Resurrection, the Glorified and Exalted Lord will address this command to His angels: “My angels, do not bring My believing servants to the Place of Resurrection on foot. Mount them on the beasts they slaughtered in sacrifice for My noble pleasure while they were in the world below. They prepared their mounts while still in the world. First I loaded them in their fathers’ loins; then I had them ride in their mothers’ wombs. When they came into the world I let them ride in their mothers’ arms, then

had them carried on their fathers' shoulders. Later on, I had them carried on horses, on donkeys, [in cars, trains, airplanes, and ships.] They died, and then I had them borne in the bier on the shoulders of their friends. Now they are rising from their graves. They have sent their mounts here from the lower world. Do not make them go on foot. Let them ride the mounts that are their own sacrifices."

In similar vein, our Master said: "Respect your sacrifices, for your sacrifices will carry you across the bridge over Hell." Respect for sacrificial beasts is shown by buying them and feeding them for a few days before the Feast of Sacrifice, combing them, dyeing them, and then not beating, cursing or hurting them on the way to the place of sacrifice. The knife should be sharp, and one should turn to face the qibla when making the cut. Further requirements are: to blindfold the animal; to proclaim the Supreme Greatness of Allāh; to say: " In the Name of Allāh … " to tie up the three sections; not to throw leftovers in the street; and to burn incense during the slaughtering.

After the animal has been slaughtered, the sacrifice should be divided into three parts, one to be eaten with the family, one presented to relatives and the third to be given to the poor. It is also permissible to distribute the whole of it among the poor. Slaughtering is done on the first, second and third days of the Feast.

Someone intending to sacrifice on the first day, should fast until the slaughtering has been done. Then he should break his fast on the sacrificial meat. When going to perform the special Feast-day prayers, one should wear new clothes if possible. If new clothes are impossible, clean underwear should be worn. One should begin proclaiming the Supreme Greatness of Allāh when going out of the house, and should continue doing so all the way to the mosque. Quarrels should be made up. Poor people

should be made happy during the days of the Feast. Those days should be enlivened with worship and affirmations of the Oneness and Supreme Greatness of Allāh. To commit things forbidden by Allāh and hated by His Messenger, such as drinking, gambling and immoral acts, is to invite the intense wrath of Allāh.

O God of All Worlds! Pardon us! Let us rejoice in Your pardon! Let us die in faith. Join us with the righteous! Have mercy on our parents! Forgive our believing brothers! Pardon the sinful Community of Muhammad! Turn their hearts to Islam. Illumine their hearts with the light of Divine Unity, and purify them with the light of Muhammad! Make our souls intimate with the soul of Muhammad! Grant that we breathe our last breath in faith! Rejoice us with Your pardon in both worlds! Deliver us from Your fire! Graciously lodge this Community of Muhammad in the proximity of Your beloved on the Day of Resurrection, as with Your help it has assembled here!

Make us not slaves to our lower selves! Make us not lackeys to the unbeliever, serfs to the tyrants! Expel us not from Your religion! Drive us not from the door of Your favor! Accept our supplications and make us glad! Amen.

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and praise be to Allāh, Lord of All the Worlds …

NOTES

[1]Descendants of the blessed Prophet.

[2]Cognomen of Fātima, may Allāh be pleased with her, meaning “Pure Woman.”

[3]Qur’ān 89:29-30: “O soul at peace, return to your Lord, well-pleased; well-pleasing! Enter among My servants! Enter My Paradise!”

[4]Once, when I told this story in the course of a sermon, certain people raised an objection. They dared to disapprove, saying: “How can a man wash his own wife?” Any reader who thinks like this, or shares this objection, had better open our greatest book after the Qur’ān itself, the collection of Traditions by al-Bukhārī, and look up the chapter entitled, “The Virtue of Fātima,” for this is what he there records. It is true that a marriage is normally dissolved by the death of one of the spouses, but the marriage of Imām °Alī and Fātima is indissoluble.

[5]khayruhu wa-sharrubu mina-llāhi ta°ālā.

[6]The month of Pilgrimage, twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.

[7]“There is no god but God, and God is Greater [than anything whatsoever].”

[8]“Allāh is Greater [than anything whatsoever] and to Allāh belongs all praise.”

[9]Because of this divine pronouncement, it became a religious duty for the Muslim community to declare the Supreme Greatness of Allāh immediately after the obligatory ritual prayers from the morning prayer on the Day of °Arafāt through to the afternoon prayer on the fourth day of the Feast of Sacrifice, making twenty-three times in all.

[10]A mithqāl is equivalent to one and one-half drams.

THE TWELFTH DISCOURSE

The Blessed Month of Ramadān

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Believers, fasting is ordained for you—as it was ordained for those before you, so that you may practice self-restraint — for a certain number of days; and for those among you who are sick or on a journey, a number of other days, while incumbent upon those who can afford it is expiation by feeding a needy person. To do good willingly is better for one, and to fast is better for you if you did but know. [2:183-184]

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THE MERIT OF FASTING, PRAYER AND HOSPITALITY IN RAMADĀN

The greatest bounty, the highest degree in this lower world of ours, is the faith we owe to the assistance, favor and kindness of Allāh. Upon us has been conferred the unique honor of being made His servants and the Community of His dearly beloved, and of being addressed by Him and given a place in the Qur'ān.

Now let us count another blessing: Once every year comes the month of Ramadān, of which "the beginning is mercy; the middle, forgiveness; the end, deliverance from the Fire."

W hen Ramadān comes, appreciate it! It passes very quickly. Life itself passes very quickly too, as does the time for prayer. Do not say: "Ramadān will come again," because a Ramadān that has gone will never come again. Next Ramadān is a different Ramadān. Maybe Ramadān will keep coming

around until the Resurrection, but this Ramadān may be your last. Do not say: “I missed that prayer but another will come.” Perhaps this prayer will be your last.

Do not say: “Let me retire and draw my pension, then I shall devote myself to worship!” Perhaps you will take your last ride before you draw your pension. They will dress you in a shroud, tying you up without rope or chain; so gird yourself for action right away. Make copious lamentation for your sins. Spend sleep less nights with heart aflame. Keep vigil for your Lord, reciting the Qur’ān. Pay homage in His Presence. Ponder your own transitory nature, remembering that He is everlasting … Ponder your own weakness, remembering that He is strong …

What a beautiful thing, to meet with the Lord! How can I get the taste of it across to you? One may speak to the blind about color, to the deaf about music and to the impotent about the joys of sexual intercourse, but can they be made to understand these experiences? Since the blind man cannot see, how can color be described to him in words? How can one show an unseeing eye the many-colored flowers, trees, sun and sky, and fish dancing in the stream? To one who has no sense of smell, how can we describe the scent of the rose, the fragrance of the hyacinth or the jonquil’s perfume? How can we tell the deaf about the chirping of the birds, the gurgling of running waters or the cadences of the Qur’ān and the call to prayer?

If you spend time alone with your Lord, one day the veil will be lifted from your eyes and you will see the colors. You will acquire the sense of smell and detect the fragrance of roses, hyacinths, jonquils and narcissi. Your deafness will disappear and you will hear the constant remembrance of Allāh. The ear of your heart will open and you will delight in recitation of the Qur’ān. Beneath the songs of the nightingales and the gurgling of the waters, you will hear the sound of the affirmation of Divine Unity.

These are the bounties you will be able to attain in this world and one day they will come to an end. As for the bounties you will achieve in the Hereafter, they have no end, but are everlasting …

When Ramadān came, could you hear the Voice calling nightly: “Does no one want Us, does no one love Us? We would love him, too!” This call is given every evening and every night in our lives. This is another divine bounty peculiar to the noble month of Ramadān. See what conversations the Prophet Moses enjoyed. Moses, the converser with Allāh, used to go to Mount Sinai. You have your own Mount Sinai at the time of breaking fast, when you can hold a thousand and one conversations. When Moses said: “O my Lord, You speak with me, You address me. Will You not show me the beauty of Your countenance? Let me see Your beauty!” he received the reply:

lan tarānī

“You shall not see Me.” [7:143]

“Moses, how can you see My beauty when there are seventy-thousand curtains between us? You are incapable of seeing Me. But near the Resurrection I shall give a month as a gift to the Community of My beloved Muhammad. That month shall be called Ramadān. To the Community of Muhammad that fasts during that month, I shall so manifest Myself at the time of breaking fast that, whereas between you and Me there are now seventy-thousand veils, there will be no veil at all between Us and the fasting Community of Muhammad at the time of breaking fast.”

In a Sacred Tradition, the Exalted One says: “The fast is for Me and it is I who reward it.”

The reward of the fast is the vision of Divine Beauty. The emblem of Ramadān is forgiveness. Fasting should be done with sincerity and ardent affection. Our blessed Master said: “If my Community knew what success and salvation reside in Ramadān, they would beg Allāh to let them spend their whole lives in that month!”

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THE THREE GRADES OF FASTING

There are three types of fast. Which type of fast do you keep? One form of fasting is to abstain from food, drink and sexual intercourse between the true dawn and sunset. It is hard to imagine anyone considering himself a lover of Allāh and yet not keeping even this sort of fast; a person like that is to be pitied.

A second type of fast is observed by those who not only abstain from these three things from dawn to sunset, but also avoid—by night as well as day—looking at unlawful things, listening to anything bad, uttering hurtful words, abuse, curses or lies, consuming forbidden food, going where Allāh does not allow, and feeling any malice or envy in their hearts. This type of fast is broken not only by eating, drinking and sexual intercourse, but also by any transgression in the matters enumerated. Such fasting is broken even by one

unlawful glance or one false remark. Although the people who observe it may eat, drink and enjoy sexual intercourse with their wives outside the month of Ramadān, the rest of their organs are actually in a state of fasting all the year round. This group is known as the “élite” of the Community. They are the Intimates of Allāh. They are men of their word. In their prayers they are humble and reverent. They guard themselves from evil. They are sure to attain success.

There is a third type of fast, which is also observed by all seven members of the body. But this fast is broken if anything other than Allāh should enter the hearts of those who keep it. Those who observe this fast are called the “élite of the élite.” The worth of these exalted beings is known only to Allāh Himself.

These are the kind of beings who want Allāh and care nothing for Paradise. It is men like these who are indifferent to the houries. As for those who lapse hundreds of times in fulfilling the basic duties of Islam, the Prayer, the Pilgrimage, the Fast and payment of the Alms-due, and who seldom bow in worship from one Friday Congregation to the next or from one Feast Day to the next, they have no right to consider themselves lovers of Allāh.

Look at the reward that is given to those who fast! When the Day of Resurrection comes, Allāh will secretly admit one group of fasting believers to His Paradise. As they stand before Paradise, its keeper, Khāzin, will put these questions to this group: “Did you not turn up at the Place of Resurrection? Were you not at the Reckoning? Did you not see the violence and horror of the Bridge?” When they reply: “No, Allāh graciously refrained from showing us these things,” he will go on to ask: “How, by what means, did you attain this level?” and they will answer: “In the world below we used to worship Allāh in secret; now in the Hereafter Allāh has secretly brought us to His Paradise.” All acts of worship can be performed

in secret. When any act of worship that should be done secretly is brought into the open, it becomes tinged with ostentation, that is hypocrisy. But in fasting there is no room for hypocritical ostentation. Fasting, by its nature, is a form of worship between Allāh and His servant. Fasting is a shield against the fire of Hell. The fire cannot touch one who keeps the fast. In one of his noble Traditions, our Master, the Glory of the Universe, says: “To my Community have been given five great divine favors, which have not been given to any other Community, which have not been attained by any other Community. The first of these five is this: on the eve of the first day of Ramadān, the Most Merciful of the merciful looks with compassion upon those of my Community who are fasting. Never again does he expose to His torment those upon whom this merciful glance has fallen.

“The second gracious favor is this: He commands the noble angels to pray for forgiveness on behalf of the Community of Muhammad.

“The third is that the mouth odor of a fasting believer is dearer to Allāh than the scent of musk.

“The fourth is this: The command is given to Paradise: ‘Beautify and adorn yourself for the Community of Muhammad.’ For Allāh has said: ‘Give my servants who believe in Me the glad tidings that they are My friends.’

“The fifth divine bounty is that He pardons and forgives all the Community of Muhammad that keeps the fast.”

FORGIVENESS FOR THOSE WHO KEEP THE FAST

According to Abū Hurayra, the Prophet said: “Whoever keeps the fast of Ramadān in faith and hopeful expectation, will have his previous sins forgiven.”

What a great divine kindness toward us … In this month, divine bounty and generosity are overflowing. Says our Master, the Messenger of the Almighty: “In every hour of Ramadān the Noble, six hundred thousand people are delivered from divine punishment. It goes on like this till the Night of Power. When the Night of Power comes, the rate of deliverance becomes equal to the total of those spared in all the hours between the beginning of Ramadān and the Night of Power; it then continues like this till the Day of the Feast.”

Clearly, the month of Ramadān is a blessed month, in which the mercy of the Eternal Lord comes overflowing. Should someone disobey Allāh during this month, not heeding His commandments, how would he appear in the divine presence on the Day of Resurrection?

The venerable Jābir reports: “Our Master, the most noble Messenger, said to us one day: ‘On the last night of Ramadān, the heavens, the earth and the angels weep for the misfortune of the Community of Muhammad.’ When we asked: ‘What misfortune, O Messenger of Allāh?’ he gave us this reply: ‘The misfortune of Ramadān’s being over. In Ramadān prayers are accepted, charity is received, good deeds are recompensed many times over, punishment is waived and sins are pardoned; so what misfortune is as great as the passing of Ramadān?” Heaven and earth weep and moan at the passing of Ramadān. But it is actually we who should be weeping, we are the ones who ought to moan and sigh, for we are parting from such a blessed month. Who can say whether we shall live to see another Ramadān?

Look once again at the divine grace peculiar to this month: the Messenger, on him be peace, said: “Allāh, Exalted is He, gives the recording angels the command: ‘Write down the good works of the Community of Muhammad, but do not record their bad deeds, and wipe out their past sins.’ ”

BREAK FAST ON LAWFUL FOOD!

When fasting for Allāh’s sake, we must precede and end the fast with lawful food. To fast after taking unlawful food is useless except as a diet of hunger and thirst, and the same applies to fasting broken in that way. In fact, the validity of any action in Islam is conditional on its being legitimate and lawful. Very difficult, in this world and the Hereafter, is the condition of those who, without fear of Allāh, transgress the rights of man and beast. If you look carefully, you will notice that the children of those who wrongfully usurp the rights of Allāh’s servants are afflicted with madness or some kind of suffering. Man and beast alike have rights that we must observe. We should pay special attention to the rights of non-Muslims. For on the coming Day of Resurrection they will take over the faith of the believers who usurped and transgressed their rights, and will cause them to be condemned in the divine presence.

It was because they knew what a grave sin it was to transgress the rights of non-Muslims, that our forebears referred to the latter as “ the flock” [ra°āyā]. At the Resurrection justice will be done; everyone will meet his own actions.

As we said above, those who consume what is unlawful are punished not only in the Hereafter, but in this world too. If Adam had not eaten something which Allāh had made unlawful, his son Cain could not have killed Abel.

The Apple the Venerable Thābit Bit …

The noble father of the venerable Abū Hanīfa, the Supreme Imām and founder of our school of Islamic Law, was the venerable Thābit, may Allāh have mercy on him. Once, in his bachelor days, he was making his ritual ablution by a stream when he saw an apple bobbing towards him on the water. He picked up the apple and took a bite. As soon as his teeth had broken the skin, he said to himself-. “What am I doing, biting something that does not belong to me without the owner’s permission?” Then he started walking back up the stream. At length he came upon a tree overhanging the water and, seeing that it bore apples, he decided that the one he had bitten must have come from it. He therefore called to a person working in the orchard: “Sir, three hours ago I found this apple downstream and I took a bite, intending to eat it. But then, as I could not bear the thought of eating something that did not belong to me, I walked all this way to return it to its rightful owner. I guess this apple must have come from your tree. Now let me give you something in exchange for it, or else pardon this trespass of mine.” Hearing this request, the owner of the orchard, whose name was Sālih, decided to put the man to the test: “No,” he said, “Impossible! I shall not let you off … How dare you bite my property without my permission?” Receiving the reply: “What must I do to earn your pardon?” the venerable Sālih said: “I will call it quits only if you work beside me in this orchard for three years.” By this means he intended to discover whether he was dealing with a pious hypocrite, a stupid Sufi wanting to appear devout, or with a perfect man who would not eat another’s property because he genuinely feared Allāh.

That was what he wanted to find out by making such a proposal, and the venerable Thābit responded without hesitation: “Yes, I shall work!” He was as good as his word, and worked out the three years. At the end of this time, the venerable Sālih said to Thābit: “Even though you have completed the

three years, I still hold you accountable for that apple. There is only one way to settle the account: I have a daughter, whose name is °Ābidatu-l'Azhar. She has neither sight nor hearing, and can move neither hand nor foot. If you will take this daughter of mine in marriage, all the apples in this orchard, and all the apple-trees, shall be yours. Where could I find a conscientious son-in-law like you? If I were to die, who would look after the poor girl in her condition? I could not entrust her to anyone but a person fed on lawful milk, such as yourself. You are religious, conscientious. Come, give me your reply and we can settle our account." "I shall take her!" answered Thābit.

The wedding was arranged, with great festivities. When the marriage had been contracted, Thābit entered the bridal chamber. Awaiting him there, dressed in her bridal clothes, he found a ravishing beauty in perfect health. Out he rushed, crying to his father-in-law: "This marriage is invalid. You told me your daughter was blind, but the girl in there has eyes like a gazelle. You told me she was a cripple, but she stands there like a cypress." To this the venerable Sālih replied: "I spoke to you metaphorically. When I called her blind, I meant blind to what is unlawful. When I called her deaf, I meant deaf to bad words and evil speech. When I said she could move neither hand nor foot, I meant that she touched nothing unlawful and never went to places Allāh disapproved of. She is your wife, your lawful spouse. She is a worthy partner for you."

The venerable Thābit married that virtuous lady, who was to be the mother of the Supreme Imām. While still a child, the latter recited the Holy Qur'ān in three days. When he came home happily to tell his mother: "I read ten parts in one day and got through the entire Qur'ān in three days," the venerable °Ābidatu-l'Azhar said: "My son, if your father had not bitten the apple without permission, you would have finished in one day!" The mercy of Allāh be upon her … [1]

EXTREME IMPORTANCE OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

As he was visiting the graves of the martyrs who had fallen in the battle of Khaybar, the Messenger paused in front of one of them. “This martyr is in the Fire of Hell,” he said. “Mercy, O Messenger of Allāh,” cried his Companions, “is it possible for a martyr in Allāh’s cause to enter the Fire:” “The clothes he is wearing belong to another,” came the explanation: “And anyone who takes what is not his own, and wears it without the owner’s permission, is in the Fire.” If the martyr in his grave has on him something belonging to another creature, despite being a martyr he is doomed to Hell.

Sit up and take notice! If you have injured someone, make amends. If you have taken someone’s property, make restitution. For you will very shortly be full of remorse. Call yourself to account before you must reckon with Allāh. Before that dread day dawns, before the bier comes to your door, before you fall into the fiery hands of °Azrā’īl, seize the opportunity you still have to carry out these simple tasks.

Do not count on your youth! That quickly comes and goes. Whoever enters this world must surely drink the wine of death one day. Even if you are a great ruler, your armies will not be able to defend you. Satisfy those who have a claim upon you. You who amass a fortune by constant stealing, for whose benefit have you piled up this ill-gotten wealth? For whom?

Your successors will consume it all. Perhaps they will be lucky, maybe not. Your goods will be left to people you hate, while torment will be your lot. Others will inherit the wealth that keeps you from Allāh. Even if they buy you an expensive tomb, give it a fine facade and a dome of gold, silver and platinum, of what use will that be to you?

They will bury you in the ground, to lie there and rot. A mere handful of earth will fill your insatiable eyes. Your kinsfolk will stroll over your grave as if they never knew you. Your heirs will share your property, not even bothering to pay off your debts. Do you suppose they will offer any charity for your sake? Do you see them giving away for your sake the money you would neither spend nor give? They will all have a good time with their loved ones on the money you left behind. They will laugh and play in the house you built. They will make merry in the garden you laid out. They will forget you in no time. Now, is it sensible to hold on to something belonging to another? Look to your great guide and make him your model, for to follow him is to take the road to Paradise. Let your example be the most exalted being after Allāh, the chief of all the Prophets, the Lord's beloved. If you love him, if you have faith in him, then study his conduct and his advice to us concerning the rights of others. Be as meticulous as he was in the matter of "human rights."

Says the venerable Ibn °Abbās: "It was during the last days of the Messenger, and he had instructed the venerable Bilāl to assemble all the Companions and Helpers in the Prophetic Mosque. The venerable Bilāl therefore called the people together there. Supported by Imām °Alī on one side and Fadl on the other, his feet trailing on the ground, our Master the most noble Messenger reached the Mosque, performed two cycles of prayer, struggled up the steps of the pulpit and took his seat. He gave thanks and praise to Allāh then, after the glorifications, delivered an eloquent sermon: When he addressed us: 'O Emigrants and Helpers!' our hearts were burnished, our hair stood on end, and tears streamed from our eyes down our beards to the ground. He then continued: 'Today is my last day in this lower world, my first day in the Hereafter. Allāh, Glorious is He, let me choose between this world and the Hereafter, and I preferred the Hereafter. I have been Prophet and counselor to you all, summoning you to Allāh. I did not take this task upon myself; I was charged with it by Allāh. I have been to you like a kind brother or compassionate father. Now I am leaving your

midst forever. There will come a day when parents will flee from their own children. The hornless sheep will receive its due from the sheep with horns. Before that day dawns, if I have struck any of you—here I am. Let him come and take what I owe him. Let him strike me back. If I have taken what belongs to any of you, let him come and ask me for it and I shall give it back.' Three times he addressed us in these terms.

"At this point, a man named °Ukāsha pushed through the Companions into the presence of the Prophet, saying: 'Messenger of God, you are more to me than my mother, my father or my own self. Three times you have urged us on oath to come and claim anything you may owe us. Had you not done so, I would not have made a request. Far be it from me to complain against you, but I come in compliance with your command. In a certain battle, my camel was side by side with yours. I dismounted and, when I turned my back to you, the whip you were holding struck me. I don't know whether it happened accidentally, as you were whipping your camel to speed it up, or whether you did it to me on purpose.' When he heard this, the Messenger, on him be peace, that compassionate Prophet who is the glory of the two worlds, said: 'God forbid, °Ukāsha! How could your Messenger possibly have struck you deliberately?' Then he called to Bilāl, the Abyssinian: 'Bilāl, go to the venerable Fātima. Get my whip and bring it here.' Holding his hands to his head, the venerable Bilāl ran wailing to the home of the venerable Fātima and asked for the whip. He wept when the she enquired: 'What are you going to do with it?' and explained: 'Retaliation is to be exacted.' Hearing this, the venerable Fātima started weeping as she said: 'Who is this person who demands retaliation on his Messenger?' Taking the whip, Bilāl returned to the Prophetic Mosque, where he saw that all the Companions were in tears. He handed the whip to the Messenger, on him be peace, and the Almighty's beloved gave it to °Ukāsha, saying: 'Take the whip, °Ukāsha!'

"Hardly able to bear what was happening, Abū Bakr and °Umar jumped up and pleaded: 'Retaliate on us, °Ukāsha!' But the Messenger said: 'Sit down,

Abū Bakr and °Umar; Allāh surely knows and sees where you stand.’ Then up got °Alī the Elect, crying: ‘Here am I, °Ukāsha! I have spent my entire life at the side of the Messenger of Allāh. I cannot allow you to exact retaliation on our Master the Messenger. Here is my back, here is my breast, here is my belly; and there is the whip. Strike me!’ But the Glory of Prophethood said: ‘°Alī, Allāh surely knows your intention and sees where you stand.’ Then up stood those two princes, those two full moons, those two fortunate ones, those two martyrs, those two victims, those two esteemed youths of Paradise, the light of the eyes of the people of the Sunna, the noble Hasan the Chosen and Husayn the Martyr of Karbalā, who sobbed tearfully: ‘Do you know who we are, °Ukāsha? We are the Messenger’s dear grandsons. Here we are. By striking us, you can exact your retaliation just as if you strike the Messenger. See, here we are. Come, do it to us!’ But the noble chief of the Prophets said to those two princes: ‘Lights of my eyes, sit down in your places. This retaliation must be performed on me.’ Then to °Ukāsha: Strike me as hard as I struck you!’ And when °Ukāsha said: ‘Prophet of Allāh, I was bare when you hit me,’ the Messenger, on him be peace, stripped off his shirt and said: ‘Strike, O °Ukāsha!’ The lamentations of the believers in the Mosque rose to the highest heaven. As the sound of their weeping and sobbing reached up to the sky, they were all bewildered about what they should do. “As soon as °Ukāsha saw the radiant body of the noble glory of Messengership, he flung the whip from his hand, embraced that noble back with love and lamentation, kissed the seal of Prophethood, and said: ‘You are more to me than my own mother and father, O Messenger of Allāh! How can I possibly demand retaliation on you? Let °Ukāshas by the hundred thousand be sacrificed for your sake. I was grateful for your offer of restitution. I was afraid of entering the Fire. I dared to act like this because I was sure that, once my flesh had touched yours, Hell would be incapable of burning this body of mine. Will a body burn when it has been in contact with yours? These ideas led me to accept your offer and demand retaliation.’ At these words, our noble Master, the Abode of the Message, turned to his Companions and said: ‘If you wish to see one of the denizens of Paradise, look upon this person here.’ Then all the Companions kissed °Ukāsha’s eyes and congratulated him warmly on having attained such high degree.”

You see, believers! How careful of human rights was he, though possessing the highest station after Allāh, who is One in His actions, One in His attributes and One in His essence. It is clear that to obey him is to obey Allāh, to betray him is to betray Allāh, and to pay allegiance to him is to pay allegiance to Allāh. By these actions of his, he has made it as plain as day how necessary it is for us to settle our accounts with other people in this life, here in this world, before the reckoning of the Day of Resurrection, in the presence of the Almighty.

No matter who we may be, if we have done just one atom of good, we shall surely see its reward; if we have done just one atom of evil, we shall definitely see its requital. None shall suffer injustice. The wages of goodness shall not be underpaid, nor shall wickedness pass unnoticed. Those in their right minds will call themselves to account, and will satisfy their creditors, before they have to reckon with Allāh. They will stop looking at unlawful things. They will earn by lawful means, and spend on lawful objects. They will discover the pleasure that lies in the sweat of one’s brow.

The experts know that children brought up on forbidden food, on money obtained through gambling or bribes, can expect a bitter existence in this world and misfortune in the Hereafter. Some corrupt individuals, who deprive people of their rights, are suffering even in this world through having children who are morons and idiots. I know of ten such cases, and you will naturally be aware of others.

Break your fast on lawful food. Fill your stomach with lawful food. Prepare your child’s seed with lawful food.

Make the most of Ramadān; fast like the righteous during the days, keep up the tarāwīh prayers during the nights, and enliven days and nights alike with worship! A life spent without worship is no life at all. Time spent without Allāh is no time at all. Pull yourself together; be active in works that are pleasing to Allāh. Our Master's blessed feet were swollen through his nights of worship. As for you and me, it is our eyes that are swollen from lack of sleep. You have stayed up many nights for the sake of your passions. You have indulged your lower selves. But how many nights, how many hours, have you gone without sleep for the sake of Allāh, to please the Prophet, on him be peace?

You will soon be lying down for a long sleep, maybe of several thousand years. Before that long sleep comes, before you are left alone in the grave with your deeds, give up just a little sleep now. Turn back to your Lord, for you must return to Him in the end. They will leave you all alone. No one will come to your aid when you lie in the ground. The ill-gotten gains you leave behind will do you no good. They will be an affliction for you. Those who consume your inheritance will not even recite al-Fātiha for you once; they will offer no celebration of the Prophet's birthday, no Qur'ān recital, no act of charity on your behalf when you are gone. And as you lie in the tomb your hands will be in chains.

Stop eating unlawful food! Should you die in debt, the Most Noble Messenger tells us, your hands will be in chains. They may not even perform the funeral prayers for a debtor until his debts are paid. Be very careful to observe the rights of animals: watch out for places where they eat, drink or rest; do not overload them. Do not burn fleas, lice, bedbugs and other such insects in the fire. Protect the rights of non-Muslims. Keep your word to them. Be faithful to your promise. Avoid untruth and do not betray a trust.

Show compassion toward all divinely created beings. Be obedient to parents in all legitimate ways! Be kind to them and all your relatives. Be very correct in matters of inheritance. Be respectful and helpful to your neighbor. Treat your brothers in religion well and with generosity! Salute friends and strangers alike and share your food with them. Do not chop trees; do not fell or set fire to the forests. To cut down a green tree is like cutting off a head.

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ENLIVENING THE NIGHTS OF RAMADĀN BY PERFORMING THE SPECIAL TARĀWĪH PRAYERS

Look at the wages of those who perform these prayers! According to °Alī ibn Abī Tālib, when our Master was asked about the virtue of the tarāwīh and the reward for doing them, he said: “He who does the tarāwīh on the eve of the first night, becomes as spotlessly clean as when his mother bore him. No trace of sin remains. Except only where the rights of man or beast are concerned! What is due to them must absolutely be discharged.

“If you do the tarāwīh on the second night, Allāh will forgive your parents if they died in faith.

“If a person does the tarāwīh on the third night, an angel proclaims from beneath the Throne: ‘Your deed was pure!’ That is to say, he gives the good news that it has been accepted by Allāh, and that your past sins have been pardoned.

“He who does the tarāwīh on the fourth night obtains a reward like that for having read the Holy Qur’ān, the Gospel, the Torah, the Psalms and the enlightening books.

“To him who does the tarāwīh on the fifth night is given the reward for one who prays at the Sanctuary of the Ka°ba, the Prophetic Mosque and the Mosque called Al-Aqsā.

“For one who does the tarāwīh on the sixth night, the reward is that of having circumambulated the Prosperous House, and rocks and trees seek forgiveness on his behalf.

“If you do the tarāwīh prayers on the seventh night, you are rewarded as if you had aided Moses, on him be peace, in his dispute with Pharaoh and Hāmān. “The reward for doing the tarāwīh on the eighth night is that given to Abraham, the special friend of Allāh, that is being crowned with the crown of Intimate Friendship.

“He who performs the tarāwīh on the ninth night becomes the beloved of Allāh. Allāh loves that servant.

“He who does the tarāwīh on the tenth night is endowed with the goodly provisions of this world and the Hereafter.

“He who performs the tarāwīh on the eleventh night will reach his Lord on the day he dies as spotlessly clean as when his mother bore him.

“He who does the tarāwīh on the twelfth night will come to the Place of Resurrection a happy and fortunate person, as radiant as the moon on the fourteenth night.

“He who does the tarāwīh on the thirteenth night will stand secure from fear on the Plain of °Arasāt.

“All the angels witness the prayer of one who does the tarāwīh on the fourteenth night. That person will escape the reckoning on the Day of Resurrection.

“The angels who carry the Throne and Footstool pronounce benedictions on one who performs the tarāwīh on the fifteenth night.

“The fortunate believer who does the tarāwīh on the sixteenth night receives a document, granting him immunity to the Fire and entitling him to enter Paradise.

“One who is present at the tarāwīh on the seventeenth night receives the reward given to the Prophets, on them be peace.

“This reward has been promised to one who performs the tarāwīh prayers on the eighteenth night: to him an angel will give these good tidings: ‘O °Abdullāh! O beloved servant of Allāh! Allāh is satisfied with you, your mother and your father!’

“To one who performs the tarāwīh on the nineteenth night, the highest degree of Paradise will be granted.

“He who performs the tarāwīh on the twentieth night will be awarded the rank of the martyrs and the righteous.

“A pavilion of light will be made ready in Paradise and presented to him who performs the tarāwīh on the twenty-first night.

“He who does the tarāwīh on the twenty-second night will come to the Place of Resurrection free of sorrow and distress.

“For one who does the tarāwīh on the twenty-third night, a city will be built in Paradise and named after him.

“One who attains the blessing of performing the tarāwīh on the twenty-fourth night will have his twenty-five supplications granted.

“The torment of the tomb will be waived for the believer who does the tarāwīh prayers on the twenty-fifth night. He will not undergo that torment.

“The lover who does the tarāwīh on the twenty-sixth night will obtain a wage as great as that for forty years of worship.

“He who does the tarāwīh on the twenty-seventh night obtains a wage like that for eighty years and more of worship. For this night is the Night of Power. He who does the tarāwīh on this night will cross the terrifying Bridge like lightning and will arrive in Paradise.

“He who enlivens the twenty-eighth night by doing the tarāwīh will be awarded a thousand degrees in the highest Paradise.

“He who achieves the blessing of performing the tarāwīh on the twenty-ninth night obtains the reward for having been on Pilgrimage one thousand times, each Pilgrimage having been accepted.

“The believer who performs the tarāwīh on the thirtieth night is addressed by Allāh in these words: ‘My servant, enter My Paradise! Eat the fruits of My Paradise. Wash in the River Salsabīl, drink from the River Kawthar. I am your Lord and you are My servant.’ Such is the divine favor that servant will achieve.”

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AWARENESS OF THE POOR AND THE HUNGRY

Those who keep the fast become conscious of the condition of the hungry. So long as our bellies are full, we have no idea of what it means to starve. Fasting subdues the lower self and strengthens the spirit. By going hungry

and thirsty, we experience in some measure how it will be at the Resurrection, before we await the bidding of Allāh and actually feel the violence and terror of that day. Nothing can subdue the lower self as effectively as hunger and thirst.

In order to teach us the base nature of the lower self, Allāh, Exalted is He, asked it at its creation: “Who are you and who am I?” When the self replied: “Whatever You are, I am that also,” He burned it in fire for a thousand years, then brought it out and repeated the same question. The answer was still the same, so He froze it for a thousand years in an icy Hell. When he took it out and asked once again: “Who am I and who are you?” the answer was still as before. This time he let it go hungry and thirsty for a thousand years. It is said that when the question was repeated after this, the lower self was reduced to impotence and said: “I am a mere creature, but You are the Lord of all worlds.”

Well, you have kept the fast and learned what it means to go hungry. Now leave your fire unlit for a day and find out what it is like for those who have no heat in their homes! Go without shoes some day; tread barefoot in the snow and ice to find out how it is for those who always go barefoot through the mud and slush! Leave your windows open one day and see what it is like to live in a house without them! Go out in the street without your coat some cold winter’s day, just to see how it is for those who have no coats at all! As long as your stomach is full, you will know nothing about the condition of the starving; as long as your own house is warm, you will not understand the actions of those who live without heat; as long as your own feet are well shod, as long as you have thick clothes and a coat to wear, you will have no idea of the state of those who go barefoot and unclad.

Satisfy the hungry, so that Paradise may love you. Clothe the naked, so that you may not be bare on the coming day of Resurrection, when all the rest

are naked. Become aware of the condition of all those paupers and orphans, for your own wife may become a pauper and your own children orphans. The wheel of fate turns. None of us knows what is to be: what great wealth may be doomed to extinction or how many, now despised, may rise to heights of dignity and honor.

Offer food at the time of breaking fast; give pleasure to the believing poor. To provide food for breaking fast is just as meritorious for the believer as fasting itself. Let your dining table be open! Provide for some of the believers and servants of Allāh, as Allāh has made provision for you, so that you may achieve success!

Wishing to Play the Host, The Venerable Abraham Finds Himself a Stranger's Guest

They say that the venerable Abraham would absolutely never sit down to a meal unless either a poor man or a guest was invited to join him at his table. He had vowed to make this his rule.[2]

Abraham, the special friend of Allāh, was pleased to receive any number of guests and had made it his custom always to share his meal with at least one guest or needy person. He had even vowed not to sit at table for up to a month, should no guest come. It once happened that over a month went by without a guest turning up at his house. This amazed the special friend of the All-Merciful, who set off and traveled some distance from home in search of a guest. Eventually he encountered a stranger and invited him back to his house, but this noble individual told Abraham that no guest had visited his place in over three months and that he had firmly resolved not to eat a meal in the absence of a guest in his own house. He then invited the special friend of the All-Merciful to come home with him. Abraham was

again amazed. He marveled to see what blessed servants Allāh had, for he had found another person whose respect for guests exceeded even his own, and who would go without a meal for as long as three months because no guest had called on him. He had wondered in his noble heart whether there might be another creature like himself, who would not eat a meal for one month in the absence of a guest. In fact, he now discovered, Allāh had such special servants as this …

Repenting and feeling remorse for having had such thoughts, he accepted the blessed individual's invitation, saying that it would give him great joy to be a guest in the home of this faithful lover. They went to his house together, shared a meal and happily conversed. Then they worshipped together. When it was time to part, the host opened the door to a room and asked Abraham, on him be peace, to choose something out of it as a memento. Abraham then asked the man if he would please make a prayer of supplication, but his host told him that he had given up making such prayers. For years he had prayed for something, he explained, but this wish of his had not been granted by Allāh. He therefore begged to be excused on the grounds that his mouth was not worthy to pray. The special friend of Allāh asked him: "What was your wish that Allāh did not grant you?" and that pure soul replied: "They say there is here on earth a special friend of Allāh, whom they call Abraham, Khalīlullāh. I really longed to see him. For years I begged my Lord to grant my wish. But the meeting was not allowed to come about, so my mouth cannot be worthy to offer a prayer of supplication. You make one, please." Allāh's special friend now realized why he had been brought there so mysteriously. His eyes ran with tears of joy, as he said: "O lover! O faithful servant! I am the Prophet Abraham. Because of your good character and conduct, Allāh has sent me to your home."

Such are the manifestations of our Lord; He brings His special friends to those who love Him. This story shows what divine grace is in store for

those who follow the exemplary conduct of Allāh's Messenger Muhammad in order to reach this station.

Offer food for the sake of Allāh. The beloved will come, as Abraham came, to those who share their meals at home and treat their guests with honor for the sake of Allāh. His very Essence of Divinity may even condescend. He is exempt from eating, drinking, sleeping and growing old. But you will receive a guest to honor whom is the same as honoring Allāh. For that guest will be someone whose seeing is with the Truth, whose hearing is with the Truth, whose holding is with the Truth and whose walking is with the Truth. To those who can understand …

The Children of Israel Invite The Lord to a Meal

The Children of Israel once said to the venerable Moses: "O Moses, we are inviting our Lord to a meal. Speak to Allāh so that He may accept our invitation!" The venerable Moses angrily replied: "Do you know that my Lord is exempt from eating food?" But when he went to Mount Sinai, he heard the divine words: "Why do you not inform Me of the invitation? My servants have invited me!" Moses said: "I am ashamed to inform Your Divine Essence about such an invitation," but the Lord commanded: "Tell My servants that I shall come to their feast on Friday evening."

The venerable Moses conveyed this message to his people, who set about making great preparations. Animals were slaughtered; kebabs, rice dishes and sweetmeats were made ready. Then all was complete and the guest was expected. This guest was no mere monarch or governor, but Allāh, the Lord of heaven and earth. Toward evening, an old man arrived, weary from a long journey and covered in dust from head to toe. "I am so hungry," he said to Moses, "Give me plenty to eat!" But the venerable Moses said: "Be

patient. The Lord of all Worlds is coming. Take this jug and fetch water. You can also serve" The old man brought water, then repeated to the Prophet Moses: "I am very tired and hungry. Let me satisfy my hunger." But the Prophet Moses dismissed him with the words: "This is hardly the time for that. The All-Glorious Lord is coming as our guest. Find something to do and make yourself useful." It was now the time for night prayers, yet no one had come or gone. The notables started criticizing Moses, on him be peace, for having deceived them and caused them to go to all that expense because Allāh was supposed to be coming. The banqueting area was in an uproar, with everybody shouting at the venerable Prophet: "You made us believe that Allāh would come. But look: there is no one coming or going." The venerable Moses was bewildered, so he went to Mount Sinai. He was very worried, having been disgraced before his people. How could this have happened? His Lord had given him His word, yet He had not come as He had promised. "My Lord," he said, "I have been put to shame before my people. You did not come as You promised You would." Then he heard the Almighty address him with these words: "My converser, I did come. I actually approached you yourself. But when I told you I was hungry, you sent Me to fetch water. I came to you again, but you sent Me away to serve. Neither you nor your people were able to entertain Me with honor."—"My Lord, an old man came and asked me for food. But he was a mere mortal. How can this be?"—"I was together with that servant of Mine. To have honored him would have been to honor Me. To have served him would have been to serve Me. All the heavens are too small to contain Me, but not the hearts of My servants. I neither eat nor drink, yet I have servants to honor whom is to honor Me. To care for them is to care for Me. To injure them is to injure Me. To despise them is to despise Me."

Love to those who understand this mystery, and how fortunate am I if I have been able to give that understanding! Do not turn away empty the beggar who comes to your door! Always treat people well, no matter who they may be! Be kind and respectful even to an unbeliever! You will find your reward in this world and in the Hereafter. Do not disappoint a person because he is an unbeliever! He is also a human being. His essence is pure,

though his attributes are unclean. If he comes to faith, even after eighty years in unbelief, he will enter Paradise. Though he has sinned for forty years, though he has disobeyed for a hundred, if he repents and gives up his sinful ways for good, his repentance will be accepted and he will become a worthy servant.

Give food and drink to the poor, out of the sustenance God has given you. I say again: even the unbeliever should share your bounty. Never turn away empty those who come to your door! What you do not give from the goodness of your heart, some tyrant may seize from you by force. If you turn away someone who is destined to receive his provision from you, Allāh will later make you take it to him and deliver it personally.

The Lord Tests Abraham, His Special Friend

Once, when the venerable Abraham was in Mecca, a dirty, unkempt individual, with long nails, came to his door and said that he had come to be the guest of Allāh's friend. When the venerable Abraham asked him what religion he followed, he let it be known that he was a Magian, who worshipped fire. The venerable Abraham would not entertain him or accept him in his home. Instead, he showed him a little room across the way, telling him to stay there and eat the food he would be given. Then he went indoors and set about preparing a meal for the Magian visitor.

Finding himself treated no better than this by the venerable Abraham, the traveler set off on the road to Medina. The Exalted One then spoke to His special friend, through inspiration: "For what reason did you despise My servant, refusing to admit him to your house? If it was because he associates partners with Me, not for one day have I ever deprived him of sustenance. I created him to be My servant and admitted him into My

service. Nothing in My creation have I created in vain; My wisdom is at work in thousands of ways in everything I have created. I sent him to you in order to test you. But you gave him no smile of welcome. Go quickly; find that servant of Mine and win his heart!”

Hearing these words, the Prophet Abraham took to the road in quest of the traveler. But nowhere could he find him. It was as if the earth had opened up and swallowed him. When he found him at last, in a place near the city of Medina, he had resolved to go down on his hands and knees and carry the man on his back all the way to Mecca, there to make him a guest in his house. “Leave me alone,” said the man: “I came to visit you once, but you did not welcome me then.” But the venerable Abraham said: “For the sake of your religion, accept my invitation. Rebuked by my Lord, I have been sent here to take you home with me.”

Setting out on the road to Mecca, hungry, thirsty and barefoot in the burning desert sands, the man was so moved by this gracious kindness of the venerable Abraham, that he said: “O Abraham, I am pleased with you and I shall enter your religion.” And so he was ennobled with the faith of Abraham.

NON-MUSLIM GUESTS TAKE PRECEDENCE

If two guests should come to a believer’s house, one of them being a non-Muslim, the latter must be honored first. As your brother in religion, the one who is a believer is already at home. Your kindness may dispose the heart of the non-Muslim toward Islam. Do good and shun evil. Remember the proverb: “Do a good deed, then throw it in the sea. If the fish don’t recognize it, the Creator does.” As our Master says in a noble Tradition:

“Be merciful to those on earth and He will have mercy on you Who is in Heaven.”

VIRTUE OF GENEROSITY, ESPECIALLY IN RAMADĀN

Be generous; abandon greediness. Generosity is one of the exalted attributes of Allāh, conferring endless divine bounty on those who adopt it. Especially in the month of Ramadān, as our Master has explained in his noble Traditions, acts of generosity are rewarded many times over. Outside of Ramadān, ten rewards are given for one good deed. But in the blessed months of Rajab, Sha°ban, Dhū-l Hijja and Muharram the ratio is seventy to one, while in Ramadān a hundred rewards are granted for a single kindness. If Allāh wills, He gives rewards upon rewards. He is Self-Sufficing. He is Generous. This He has promised in a Verse of the Qur’ān:

He that does a good deed shall be recompensed tenfold; but he that does evil shall only be requited with the same; and they will not be wronged. [6:160]

And in another Verse:

The likeness of those who spend their wherewithal in the cause of Allāh is that of a grain producing seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. Allāh gives manifold to whom He wills. Allāh is All-Embracing, All-Knowing. [2:26].

Indeed, our Master tells us in one of his noble Traditions: “Generosity is a tree. Its branches spread out over the globe. Whoever grasps one of these branches will lift up his companion and take him to Paradise. Greed, avarice, parsimony and stinginess are a tree that grows in Hell.” In other words, Paradise is the home of the generous, while Hell is the place of the greedy.

A Woman Dreams of Taking Water From Paradise

According to the venerable °Ā’isha, Mother of the Believers, a woman with a withered hand came one day into the presence of the Messenger. She told him that she had experienced a dream, and how her hand had subsequently withered, and she begged his intercession so that she might recover its use. The Messenger of Allāh asked what manner of dream it was, that her hand should have withered after it, and so the woman explained:

“Messenger of Allāh, in my dream the Resurrection had begun and all mankind had gathered at the Place of Resurrection. The Balance had been set up, and Hell had been brought to that place. Paradise had also been brought near, with its adornments and finery, its pavilions, houries and attendants. Then I looked and saw my mother, with a piece of suet in one hand and a bit of old cloth in the other. She was trying to protect herself with this suet and cloth from the fires in Hell, attempting to use them as a shield against the flames. I wept when I saw her in this condition, crying: ‘My dear Mummy, what are you doing in this valley of Hellfire? In this world below, you were obedient and faithful to the Lord of all Worlds. You were kind to my father, and he was happy with you.’ But my mother said: ‘That is true, my dear heart, but I was a greedy, stingy person. All I could ever bring myself in my whole life to donate in Allāh’s cause was this suet and this bit of cloth in my hand. Now I am trying to use them as my protection against the fire. For this valley is a part of Hell, where the stingy

and the greedy suffer torment.' Then I asked where my father was. He had been a generous person. She told me that he was now in Paradise, the home of the generous. I moved on to Paradise, where my father was standing beside your pond, giving water to the people of Paradise. Those arriving thirsty and tired from the Place of Resurrection would slake their thirst at the Messenger's pond, either from the hand of Muhammad himself, from the hands of Imām Hasan and Imām Husayn, or from those of our masters °Alī the Elect, Abū Bakr, °Umar and °Uthmān, and the other Intimates of Allāh and generous persons. Here was this man, also giving water to the Community of Muhammad from the Prophet's pond. That was how he acted during his life. I went up to my father and said: 'My dear Daddy, here you are, being kind to everyone. This station has been conferred upon you. My mother was a lady obedient to Allāh, who avoided unlawful things in her prayers and in her fasting. You were pleased with her, too. But now she is burning in Hell, while you are giving people water from the Prophet's pond. Since this task has been allotted to you, fill a cup for me to take to my dear mother.' My father replied: 'O light of my eyes, what you say is true. But the greedy and stingy have been forbidden to drink from the pond of the Messenger, so I am not allowed to give you what you ask.' I nevertheless filled a cup and was walking toward Hell to give it to my mother, when I heard a voice behind me saying: 'May Allāh cause your arm to wither! How dare you give water from the pond of the Prophet, on him be peace, to a miser?' When I awoke, I saw that my right arm had withered." The noble intercessor-by-divine-leave then laid his staff on the woman's hand, saying: "My Lord, if what this woman says is true, please heal her arm." Her arm was immediately restored to health, in better condition than it had ever been before.

The following story also concerns the Prophet's pond in Paradise:

A Rāfidī Experiences an Instructive Dream

A Rāfidī is a schismatic who hates the venerable Abū Bakr, °Umar and °Uthmān, and who dares to pretend that he thereby proves his love for our master °Alī the Elect. See what befell one of these, how he met with a welcome and a rebuff:

A certain Rāfidī once dreamt that the Resurrection had begun; mankind had gathered at the Place of Resurrection and when he approached the pond of the Prophet, on him be peace, a blessed individual filled a cup and offered it to him. “Who are you?” asked the Rāfidī, and the reverend being replied: “I am that person who was the first of the great to believe in the Most Noble Messenger. I am the one who accompanied the Messenger throughout his life in all his battles, who spent all his wealth in his cause and was content to wear a simple cloak. His minister in his lifetime, his successor at his death, his companion in the cave, his father-in-law by divine decree; it was I who led the prayer in his prayer-niche while he was still alive. Intercessor for half of this Community, I am the one who prayed that my body might be enlarged to fill all the space in Hell, leaving no room in the Fire for the Community to burn!” The Rāfidī withdrew, saying: “I understand. You are Abū Bakr. I shall not drink water from your hand! °Alī is all I need.” A little further on, he encountered another blessed individual, likewise dispensing from the Prophet’s pond. He asked him who he was …

This person replied: “I was the fortieth Muslim, whose true faith and submission were manifested together, father-in-law to the Messenger, father of Hafsa, together with the Messenger of Allāh in all his battles, my judgment the subject of seventy-seven Verses of the Qur’ān, the second Caliph of the Prophet, his consultant during his lifetime, the son-in-law of °Alī the Elect. Of me he said: ‘Had there been a Prophet to come after me, it would have been °Umar ibn al-Khattāb.’ I am the man who conquered Syria, Egypt and Persia; who gave commands to an army at a distance of three months’ marching time; who drove the fire from the Yemen; who made the River Nile comply with my orders; deliverer of the Aqsā Mosque; who cared nothing for the world below; who wore a cloak of forty patches,

even though the Muslim Treasury was filled to overcrowding; in whose Caliphate the sheep and the wolf shared pasture, the wolf not daring to attack the sheep." The Rāfidī withdrew once more, saying: "I understand. You are °Umar ibn al-Khattāb. I shall not drink your water, either. I shall drink from the hand of °Alī the Elect." Again he was met by a blessed individual, who offered him a cup of water from the pond of the Messenger, and again he asked: "Who are you?" This time, the reply was:

"I am the one who married two of the Messenger's precious daughters; when my wives passed over to the Hereafter, the Messenger said of me: If I had had hundreds of daughters, I would have given them to °Uthmān.'I am the one to whom the Messenger said: O righteous °Uthmān, pray for me.' I am the amanuensis of the Qur'ān. The angels are shy of me. Victim and martyr am I. With fasting mouth I made the final testimony. I spent my wealth in the cause of Islam. Although an Umayyad, I was one of the first to believe. I was congratulated in my lifetime on the promise of Paradise. I am the Messenger's third Caliph."

When the Rāfidī heard this, he said: "You are °Uthmān. Your water is no good to me, either." His words saddened °Uthmān. The man moved away, to be met by a blessed individual with the build of a lion, who also greeted him kindly. Once again he asked: "Who are you?" and that worthy individual said: "I am the Lion of Allāh; owner of the sword called Dhū-l Fiqār; victor of Khaybar; cupbearer of the water of Paradise; husband of the Messenger's dearly beloved daughter Fātima the Radiant; father of Hasan and Husayn; greatest of the People of the Prophet's Household; concerning whom many Qur'ānic Verses were sent down; of whom the Messenger said that those who hate me are hypocrites, while those who love me are believers; whose dignity is proclaimed in the Prophetic Tradition: 'Of those whose master I am, °Alī is master also;' the first child to believe in the Messenger; at the Messenger's side in all his battles; who lay in the Messenger's bed at the Hijra, ready to sacrifice his life to help him escape; drowned in the sea of affliction; the compliant and open-handed one am I."

When the Rāfidī heard this, he cried: “You are °Alī the Elect. I recognize you. O Imām, before I met you I was offered water by Abū Bakr, °Umar and °Uthmān, but I did not accept their offerings.” The face of the Lion of Allāh became suddenly flushed at these words. He gave the Rāfidī a mighty slap in the face, saying: “One who does not drink their water, shall not drink our water either!” When the Rāfidī recovered consciousness, he saw that he had spewed thirty-two teeth into the palm of his hand. He repented, felt remorse for his actions and forsook his hatred of our masters, the venerable Sheikhs Abū Bakr, °Umar and °Uthmān, may Allāh be pleased with them all.

These, and all the generous ones, are cupbearers of the Prophet’s pond in Paradise. Be generous! Sacrifice not just your money, but all you possess, in Allāh’s cause. Those who do not give what they love cannot reach their Beloved. O Lord! Assemble us on the coming Day of Resurrection beneath the Banner of your loved one! Make noble Ramadān the intercessor for us all! Make us secure from Your complaint! You are the Most Generous of the generous. You do not deprive of sustenance even the unbeliever, the polytheist and the hypocrite. We are Your servants, who have believed in You and become the Community of Your beloved. Our mouths are fasting, our faces pale, our hearts trembling in awe of Your Majesty and Glory. Our eyes are moist because of Your promise. Our hearts throb with Your love and the love of Your beloved.

We come in hope of Your Mercy, Your Paradise and Your Beauty. Far be it from You to disappoint us. Do not disappoint us! Grant that we may end our allotted span by uttering that blessed sentence: “I testify that there is no god but Allāh, and I testify that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger”! Protect us from the terror and pain of death. Let us not die without faith! Have mercy on those of us who have died. Let our parents still living rejoice in Your pardon and forgiveness! Grant happiness to the entire Community of Muhammad. Pardon the sinful Community of Muhammad and illumine their hearts with the light of the Qur’ān and the light of the

affirmation of Divine Unity. Do not condemn us to our own lower selves; make us not abject in this world, disgraced in the Hereafter. Make us light of body, chaste of soul. Grant that we may earn by lawful means, using for good works the wealth we obtain by the sweat of our brow, and spending in Your cause. Endow our bodies with health and well-being. Preserve us all, my Lord, from dependence on the unworthy … Let our end and destiny be good! Make our children sure-footed in the religion of Islam! Let our character be in keeping with the ethics of the Qur'ān and of the All-Merciful's beloved! Accept our supplications, joining them to those made at the Resting Place of the Messenger!

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds …

NOTES

[1]People often ask about the name of the mother of the Supreme Imām. His blessed mother was called °Ābidatu-l'Azhar. His maternal grandmother was the venerable Zara; his maternal grandfather, the venerable Sālih. His paternal grandmother was the venerable Sāliha. These names are mentioned in the following sources: Rawdatu-l°Ulamā, Silsile-iNu°mānīye and Jāmi°u-l'Adab.

[2]It was the same way with our forebears, who always entertained one or more orphans, widows or paupers as guests in their houses, each according to his situation. For our Master, the Glory of the Universe, said: "There is no better house than one that has an orphan in it." He also said: "One who takes into his care the orphan of a relative or brother in religion, will be as close to me as these two fingers of mine are close to each other." Would anyone who believes in Allāh, who loves His Prophet more than his own

soul, refuse to have an orphan in his house? Could he fail to help the orphan, the destitute?

Since our Master himself grew up as an orphan, it is obvious that anyone who looks after an orphan will have shown respect for the Messenger and will certainly have made him happy.

THE THIRTEENTH DISCOURSE

Patience and Forbearance

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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If you advise others to be patient …

By the Time! Man is surely at a loss; except for those who believe and do good works, commending truth and patience one to another. [103:1-3]

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INTERPRETATION OF SŪRAT AL-°ASR

To enter this world is to fall into the whirlpool of affliction. Yet deliverance from this sea of trouble is possible, through faith, sincerity, good works, obeying the Qur'ān and following the way of the Messenger.

This we know from the noble Verses we have just been reading. Allāh swears by the Time. What time? Many meanings have been suggested for the Arabic word °asr in this context. Some say it means the time when the Messenger was born and lived. The time of the Messenger is well known to the experts. In this time the company of the Prophets was completed; in it occurred the revelation of the Qur'ān, the cream of the one hundred and four scriptures; the beloved and glorious Prophet made his appearance; all the commands and prohibitions and all other relations between Allāh and His servants, everything concerning communication in the Unseen, all these achieved final expression in this time.

In this time lived God's beloved, the Primal Light and Final Prophet, and in it also his children, his companions, his followers and his saints made their appearance. By this Time does Allāh swear …

The Time by which Allāh swears is also the short time between the appearance of Muhammad and the Resurrection. The shortness of this time is hinted at by the word °asr, for one of its meanings is the time of late afternoon prayer, not long before sunset …

Whatever the divine meaning may be, it is an oath sworn by the Lord of heaven and earth. No question remains. To enter this lower world is like falling into a fearful sea, to which there is no boundary, edge or limit. Upon this ocean many ships are afloat. One of these is the ship of status, rank and love of this world. Its captain: Satan. Another is the ship of distorted religion. Its captain: Satan. Then there is the ship of irreligion, of atheism. Its captain: also Satan. Safe as these ships may appear, they are all heading for the rocks; they will certainly sink and be swallowed by the deep.

THE SHIP OF ISLAM

There is another ship upon this ocean. Its hull is Lā ilāha illā-llāh, its sail is Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh and its rudder is modesty and reason. Its crew are the Prophets of Allāh. These Prophets were in ships named after themselves, till they took refuge aboard this ship to escape from Satan and from human devils. The name of this ship is “The Religion of Islam,” and its captain is our blessed Master Muhammad. Its passengers are the believers, its cooks are the scholars, its doctors are the saints of Allāh. This blessed captain holds out a rope to those who have boarded other ships, or who have fallen in the sea, crying: “Come aboard my vessel; save yourselves from perdition.” He tells them: “Your ship has been seized from its captain’s control. Your captain has also taken refuge aboard our ship. Your captain is over here. The one you supposed to be your captain is really Satan.” Those who have the good fortune to hear and heed these words promptly escape to the ship of Islam. The ship’s rope is the Qur’ān, its ladder being good works.

This is a parable. The All-Glorious One says: “I swear by the Time. All men are in a state of loss, of perdition. Only those who have faith, who do good works, can escape from that condition.”

No one can save himself except by having faith, standing firm in the truth and calling others to it, enduring with patience and commending patience to others. All are in perdition. There is no deliverance from it except for those who surrender their self-will, have faith, perform good works, commend the truth and commend patience. They achieve salvation from that state of loss.

PATIENCE & FORTITUDE

Everything begins with patience. Patience is the starting point of Islam, of faith and of good works. In guarding oneself from evil, the first requirement is patience to resist temptation in the struggle with the lower self. One who lacks patience can maintain neither faith, nor good works nor good name.

There are many kinds of patience: First comes patience in faith, then patience in obedience. The third kind is patience in the face of evil and sin. There is also the patience of a donkey, but let us not call it patience. That is mere stubbornness, while Patience is one of the blessed Divine Names.

What is patience in faith? Some members of earlier communities were subjected to burning and crucifixion by unbelievers who sought to make them renounce their faith. Yet, despite a hundred thousand agonies and torments, not one of them could be turned from his religion and the path of

truth.[1] Every kind of torture was also inflicted on those noble Companions, the radiant Bilāl the Abyssinian, Yāsir (°Ammār's father), and Sumayya, but they would not desert Muhammad, the beloved of the All-Merciful, and his most praiseworthy religion.

Many had their eyes gouged out, or were torn asunder by having a leg tied to each of two camels, which were then driven off in opposite directions. But nothing would induce these believers to abandon their faith. On the contrary, they displayed patience and fortitude in the face of these persecutions, crying: "Allāh is One; His Messenger is Ahmad!"[2] and gulping the wine of death as they attained the rank of martyrdom. Because of her faith, Zaynab, the slave girl of Abū-l Hakam, had her eyes burnt out by the red-hot sword of her master, who then left her blind in the fiery wilderness. Yet she bore these terrible adversities with patience, not a word escaping her blessed mouth except the profession of faith: "There is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh." This Zaynab was later to have her eyes miraculously restored by the Prophet, on him be peace.

As for that Abū-l Hakam, who burned the eyes of this queen of the Hereafter because she said "Allāh" and gave her heart to Muhammad, he certainly faces everlasting torment, his own eyes blinded by the fire of Hell, where he will abide forever.

The accursed Abū Jahl became infuriated when his tortures failed to impress Sumayya, whose faith he sought to break. He said to her one day: "Either you leave Muhammad's religion, or I am going to kill you!" But Sumayya responded with: "There is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is Allāh's Messenger." At this, he flew into a violent rage, kicked that princess in the stomach with his accursed foot, knocked her to the ground and kicked out her guts till she died a martyr. Now Sumayya is with our Master in Paradise, while the accursed infidel Abū Jahl is boiling in the Fire. Because

of her martyrdom, Sumayya will receive merciful blessings till the Resurrection. But maledictions will be heaped upon the accursed Abū Jahl till that same Day, as they are now.

As for Yāsir, the noble father of °Ammār, he gave up his life for the sake of Allāh, for the love of Muhammad, beneath the spear of Abū Jahl. He made him self a shroud from his own blood. The story of the venerable Bilāl has been narrated elsewhere.[3]

Through their steadfast faith in God and the Prophets, their patience in affliction and their refusal to yield to persecution, earlier communities likewise delivered themselves from eternal perdition.[4] If they could display such patience and fortitude in their faith, though they did not belong to the Community of Muhammad, surely we must show long-suffering for the sake of our faith when misfortunes assail us? For we are the Community of a glorious Prophet, who was sent as a mercy to all worlds, and it certainly behooves us to be a Community worthy of him.

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A patient person is a fortunate person. His rank in the sight of Allāh is extremely high. The patient are praised and extolled by Allāh in the Holy Qur'ān, where He says:

Allāh is with those who patiently endure. [2:153]

THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

Patience rescues mankind from mere animality. If we exercise patience in pursuit of some goal, we can reach that goal. Through patience in poverty, we can achieve riches. By patiently enduring his oppression, we can prevail against the foe.

Many a little band has overcome a teeming host, by Allāh's leave; Allāh is with the steadfastly enduring. [2:249]

Those who patiently suffer the pain of separation must one day be reunited. Hence the proverb: "Patience is the key to happiness."[5]

As we said before, patience is of several kinds. The Exalted One rewards each kind appropriately. The highest rank is attained in His sight by those who are patient in faith, unwavering no matter what agony and torment they may have to bear.

Martyrdom of the Lady Māshita and Her Family

There was once a treasurer of Pharaoh who had a wife by the name of Māshita. As well as being married to the treasurer, the venerable Māshita acted as nursemaid to Pharaoh's daughter. Though she appeared to be a mere nurse, however, Māshita was in fact a great queen of wisdom. She believed in the venerable Prophet Moses, the Converser-with-Allāh. Keeping her faith a secret, she would pray to her Lord in solitude.

In order to provide those who claim to be true believers with an example of how steadfast one must be in patience and long-suffering, Allāh brought into the open the hidden faith of His servant Māshita. It came about like this:

One day in the bath, Māshita was combing the hair of Pharaoh's daughter when she dropped the comb. As she bent down to retrieve it, she involuntarily uttered the name of her dear Lord, saying: "In the name of Allāh, cursed be he who disbelieves." By this she meant:

"I pick up this comb in the name of Allāh, the All-Merciful and Compassionate. A curse be on that person who denies his Lord." Pharaoh's daughter was amazed to hear this and she said: "What are you saying, Māshita? Is there a God other than my father?" For, just as we say "Bismillāh" ("In the name of Allāh"), Pharaoh's followers used to begin everything they did with "In Pharaoh's honor." Māshita then told the girl: "Yes, there is a Creator of heaven and earth and all things. Even your father is a creature, born of his father and mother. Since he was born, he will also die. There is only One God, Allāh, who created your father and will cause him to die. I believe in Him." The girl said: "I shall tell my father about this. You will be severely punished, for your words will corrupt our followers."

The girl did in fact tell her father everything that had happened, saying that he ought to have Māshita put to death. Pharaoh then summoned Māshita into his presence and said: "Is it true that you believe in a God other than me? Am I not your lord most high?" Māshita now declared her faith openly before Pharaoh: "God forbid!" she exclaimed: "You are a mortal man. Your body and your kingdom must pass away. I believe in a Lord whose being and whose kingdom never cease. He is One, devoid of all attributes of deficiency and qualified with all attributes of perfection. There is no god

but Allāh; Moses is Allāh's Converser.[6]" Pharaoh was ready to explode with rage. How could a woman deny his divinity to his very face? She had dared to tell him directly that he was a nonentity and that his kingdom would not last forever. To make her recant, they subjected her to all kinds of torture. Her nails were drawn. Hanging from the ceiling by her hair, she was whipped till she bled. But all to no avail! The queenly Māshita would utter nothing but the affirmation of Divine Unity; she kept saying: "There is no god but Allāh, Moses is Allāh's Converser.[6]" What steadfastness!

This woman and her husband would have to be tortured in a way that would deter others! Pharaoh had the martyr Māshita crucified. This lady had two daughters, one a small baby, and the other a girl of five. Pharaoh sent for these two angels. Holding the older one up to her mother, he asked the venerable Māshita: "Will you now recant?" When her sole reply was: "There is no god but Allāh; Moses is Allāh's Converser," they forced open Māshita's jaw, held the child's throat over her mouth and slit that innocent throat with a knife. The child's blood gushed into the venerable Māshita's mouth and spattered over her face. Her hands and feet were nailed to the cross. Again Pharaoh howled like a dog: "Is there any God apart from me?" But the venerable Māshita would only say; "Allāh is One. There is no god but He. Moses is His Converser, His Prophet." Then they brought the baby, who had gone hungry for many hours. The little creature touched her mother's breast, expecting to be given the teat she could smell. At this point, Satan came to tempt the venerable Māshita, saying: "Māshita, just tell him he is your lord and be saved; then keep up your faith in secret!" Māshita could not bear what had happened to her first child. How could she endure the slaughter of her baby? How innocent she was, her pretty eyes in tears! She kept calling for the breast. But at the very moment when her mother was about to yield to the Devil's prompting, Allāh suddenly gave that tiny child her tongue: "Mother!" she cried, "Have patience; do not renounce your faith!" This speechless infant was now talking: "Mother!" said she, "Do not turn away from Allāh. Do not believe in this accursed creature. You need hide your faith no longer. Do not sigh, do not grieve. See, your Lord has created a palace for you in Paradise. There it stands

before you. The palace servants, the houries and attendants await you eagerly. Die in glory rather than live in degradation! Be a martyr. Have patience. Attain the mercy of Allāh."

Pharaoh cried in amazement: "Alas! Do not let the child speak. If word of this gets out, there will be disorder among the people. Slay her at once and get rid of her." They held the little angel to the venerable Māshita's mouth and slit her throat. But the venerable Māshita sighed and sorrowed no more, for death was not a moment away. Pharaoh had made up his mind to kill the lady Māshita's husband as well. Ordering him brought into his presence, he said: "Declare your faith in me; declare that I am Allāh." Distraught at the sight of his two children lying in pools of blood, and at the tragic condition of his wife, the father said: "May Allāh curse you!" At this, Pharaoh sent for a cauldron, in which he caused water to be boiled. One by one, he had the martyrs plunged into the scalding water: the corpses of the two children, Māshita and then her husband. A voice called to them from the cauldron: "O special servants of Allāh, this is not fiery heat. This is the road to Paradise. Make haste."

They sacrificed their lives in the cause of Allāh and their religion, for the sake of their Beloved. May Allāh be pleased with them all. Our Master, the blessed Messenger, says: "As I was going on my Ascension, Gabriel showed me a tomb. From that tomb issued the scent of musk and amber and it had become one of the gardens of Paradise. When I asked Gabriel whose tomb it was, he said: 'O Messenger of Allāh, this is the tomb of Pharaoh's treasurer, of the queenly Māshita, once nursemaid to Pharaoh's daughter, and of their two children.' "

HOW 'PATIENCE IN ADVERSITY' IS REWARDED

The All-Glorious One actually grants us the patience to endure the misfortunes he sends and we obtain a magnificent reward if we do patiently endure such affliction. Patient or not, what can we do for ourselves? If we complain, we shall have complained of Allāh to His servants. The only proper course is to accept misfortune as a divine blessing in disguise, and to be patient. Says °Abdullāh ibn Mubārak: “To one who is patient, misfortune is single. To the impatient it is two fold. There is a great misfortune and there is a passing misfortune. The great misfortune lies in losing through impatience the reward that will be given for patience in adversity.’ The other misfortune is one to which no reward attaches.”

In a Sacred Tradition, the Lord says: “If I direct a misfortune at one of My servants, and he meets it with fine patience, I shall be ashamed on the Day of Resurrection to subject him to a balancing of accounts.”

Āyāz and The Cucumber

Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna once shared a cucumber with his favorite courtier. The Sultan peeled the cucumber, then gave half of it to Āyāz with his own hand and ate the other half himself. The Sultan noticed that the cucumber he was eating was as bitter as poison, but Āyāz seemed to be enjoying his half, so he asked him in surprise: “How is it that you are not even screwing up your face, when the cu cumber you’re eating is so bitter? Why don’t you spit it out?” Āyāz replied: “My dear Sultan, I have enjoyed so many bounties from your hands. After all that, how could the cucumber taste bitter? Would it not be ungrateful of me to spit out the good thing you have given me now, when your hand has given me tasty morsels by the hundred? Even if you did give me something bitter, it would taste sweet to me.”

If Āyāz was so reluctant to appear ungrateful for a benefit conferred upon him by someone who, after all, was only a mortal, ought we not to be much more grateful still toward Allāh for all His grace and blessings, which no human being could ever give us?

To Us they do no harm, but themselves they did harm. [2:57]

The Martydom of Queen Āsiya

Consider the great power which the venerable Āsiya gave up for the sake of her faith and Allāh. She was the wife of a sovereign, yet she was prepared to suffer torment and she attained true happiness. Her husband Pharaoh was no ordinary sovereign. His worldly authority was mixed up with religion and he had his people recognize him as a god. The words he spoke were like sacred scripture. Everything he said or wished had to be carried out and no one could stand against him. Pharaoh's wife shared in the same kind of authority. But, although she was Pharaoh's wife, the venerable Āsiya accepted the Prophethood of the venerable Moses. For her, belief in Allāh and His Prophet was sweeter than anything else. She was a loving servant of Allāh, faithful to the venerable Moses and steadfast in his religion. For many years she concealed her religion and her faith. She used to worship Allāh in secret places. Amazed at the patience and long-suffering displayed by the venerable Māshita in the face of her misfortunes, and fascinated by the divine favor shown to that venerable lady, her husband and her infant child, she resolved to become a martyr herself to demonstrate to future believers that the delight of sacrificing one's life for the sake of Allāh is superior to any worldly delight, superior even to the pleasure of sovereignty. She therefore chose to attain the rank of martyrdom by openly declaring her religion and faith, as the venerable Māshita had done.

After the martyrdom of the venerable Māshita, her two children and her husband, Pharaoh could not contain his fury. These death-defying martyrs had affronted his dignify in the presence of those subjects of his who had witnessed the scene. Divinity could not be like that. Even a servant in his own retinue had disobeyed him and refused to acknowledge his divinity. Pharaoh withdrew to his room in a rage. When the venerable Āsiya came and asked him why he had killed those poor creatures, he said: “They denied my divinity. That is why I had them put to death in such a tragic manner.” Then he added, “I had to act in that way to keep the loyalty of my subjects. Let this be a lesson to all who might do what they did.” Then the venerable Āsiya said: “How can you be a god? It is Allāh who has created you and me. Both you and I shall die, as all before us have died.” When he heard this, Pharaoh cried: “Do you also believe in Moses?” “Yes, said she, “I also believe in Allāh, Lord of heaven and earth. There is no god but Allāh; Moses is Allāh’s Converser.” Then Pharaoh said: “Take those words back. Much as I love you, I shall inflict grievous tortures upon you and make you regret what you have said.” But the venerable Āsiya replied: “No! I shall not recant. I am ready to sacrifice your power for this belief.” Pharaoh was now scarlet with rage and he again demanded: “Renounce what you have said.” But the venerable Āsiya reiterated the affirmation of divine unity and confirmed the prophet hood of Moses, on him be peace, whereupon Pharaoh called: “Executioner!” The executioners came in and he said: “Take this woman and crucify her.” The executioners were astonished. How could he hand over his dearly beloved wife and consort to them? Pharaoh howled like a rabid dog: “What are you waiting for? Take her at once. I told you to crucify her, didn’t I!”

They took the venerable Āsiya, stretched out her arms and nailed her to a plank. They put her feet one above the other and nailed them down also, then set her in a high place and left her under the sun. Pharaoh announced that anyone who did not believe in his divinity would suffer the same punishment. Twice every day he went and said: “Āsiya, renounce your declared belief and I shall pardon you, take you close to me again and shower good things upon you. But still she replied: “There is no god but

Allāh; Moses is Allāh's Converser." She had vowed and resolved to be patient and steadfast in her afflictions. Her wounds attracted packs of wolves and they began to eat the venerable Āsiya. The intense heat of the sun made her parched. She moaned: "Water, water!" until the Glorified and Exalted Lord graciously lifted the veil from her eyes and showed her her station in Paradise. Angels were sent to bring her the good news. They told her that Allāh had sent her greetings. He praised and congratulated Āsiya on her steadfastness and faith, promising that in the Hereafter he would make her the wife of His beloved Muhammad. The venerable Āsiya smiled when she heard these good tidings. When Pharaoh saw this he thought she must have gone out of her mind. This woman must surely have gone insane to smile like that after being nailed up in the sun for days without food or water. In fact, the angels had brought her greetings from her Exalted Lord. They told her that the Exalted One said of her: "How many days has she been scorched in the sun for My sake without eating or drinking? What agonies has she suffered in her hunger and thirst? She has borne her suffering with patience. I have made her a present of the wine from the river of Paradise. Let her drink and find life anew. This new life she has found will never end in death. She desired Me, so let her come to Me. Let her see the bounties I have prepared for her." The venerable Āsiya drank the wine of Paradise from the hands of the angels and surrendered her soul to the Lord. She had attained "the Seat of Truthfulness." Because of her patience in faith, the venerable Āsiya now eats the food of Paradise and drinks from its streams. We read in the commentary on the Kashshāf that in the Hereafter the venerable Āsiya will become the wife of our Master. She has attained this blessedness through her patient endurance …

A person who knows the joy of faith, though he be a king, will give up his throne for the sake of faith. It is well known, for instance, that the venerable Ibrāhīm Ad'ham, may his soul be sanctified, gave up his throne and his crown because of his love of Allāh. As for Pharaoh's kingdom, Pharaoh did not keep it. But the kingdom given to the venerable Āsiya will never be taken from her. Pharaoh is in torment and in fire, while the venerable Āsiya is in Paradise and in light. The mercy of Allāh be upon her …

Patience is an attribute of Allāh. Even cosmic events teach us a lesson in Patience. The Lord who is capable of creating the whole universe with a single command: “Be!” explains in his Wise Book that he created this world in six days. Plants mature in six months and trees give fruit annually. Some take two years to bear fruit after they have been planted, while others take five, ten, fifteen or even thirty years.

MATURITY TAKES TIME

As for the creation of a human being, blood develops forty days after the seed is deposited in the mother’s womb; on the eightieth day the body begins to form; the spirit of life enters on the one hundred and twentieth day and the child is born after nine months and ten days. The prime is reached at the age of forty. The development of all creatures proceeds patiently and deliberately. Nothing comes into being without patience.

Allāh, the Lord of Glory, explains to us that nothing comes to us in a hurry, but only through patience, through accepting with patience the rewards we shall obtain for our good deeds or the punishment we must suffer for our bad deeds.

Patience in the face of all misfortunes is a sure fortress of Allāh. Those who take refuge in that fortress achieve prosperity in this world and the next. Salvation is for the patiently enduring! The Qur’ān tells us:

We shall surely test you with some fear, some hunger, some loss of goods and lives and produce; but give glad tidings to the patient ones. [2:155]

One who displays fortitude in the face of such misfortune, is equipped with a ‘fine patience’. Those who achieve success are the ones who say, when some misfortune befalls them: “We belong to Allāh. He rules in His Kingdom as He wills. We are His creatures and we shall return to Him.” It is these who are content with their Lord. It is these who attain right guidance. It is these who enter God’s Paradise and behold His Beauty …

To one who believes in Allāh, a trial sent by his Lord is a blessing to be accepted with gratitude and borne with patience. Whether we are patient or impatient, Allāh is the Judge and we are the judged. In His Kingdom, Allāh disposes as He wills. Through exercising patience, we learn the measure of our faith in Allāh. Thus does Allāh direct the heedless, saying: “I have special servants like these.”

This is what we mean when we say that Allāh tests His servant. We do not mean—perish the thought—that He experiments with His servant to find out something He does not know about him already. I beg forgiveness of Allāh for even mentioning such an idea, since Allāh is utterly removed from that kind of testing. He is the Knower of the unseen and the visible. What is meant by God’s testing is Allāh’s revelation of the divine mystery.

To be patient in worshipful obedience means keeping the fast even on hot summer days, observing the ritual prayers in the proper manner and when they are due, paying the alms-due unstintingly, calmly awaiting the harvest after sowing the crops, complying with all of Allāh’s commands and avoiding everything He has forbidden. Allāh, Glorified and Exalted is He,

promises to confer untold rewards, infinite Paradises on those who are patient. Allāh never breaks His promise.

We also mentioned patience in adversity. Many instances and examples of this have been given above. Patience in temptation is a similar case. For instance, true manliness is demonstrated by one who rejects the immoral invitation of a pretty woman. To do so is to achieve great distinction in the sight of Allāh. Right guidance and a splendid reward are likewise attained by forsaking everything attractive to the lower self, but displeasing to Allāh, such as strong drink and gambling, and by sincere and patient repentance. As for the charitable person who endures an insult without rancour, and repays it not in kind but with kindness, the Holy Qur'ān tells us that he is worthy of Allāh's love.

Impatience is always at the root of crimes and other disasters. When a man loses patience, he falls a prey to his anger; in a moment of fury he may commit an act he will regret for the rest of his life. If you fall in with bad company, you must expect to end up groveling in court. If you bite the dog that bites you, where is the difference between you and the dog? It is an animal and acts on impulse. As a human being, you should be patient; restrain your impulsiveness. One who lacks patience inevitably brings trouble upon his own head.

Be patient! Through patience the mulberry leaf is turned into satin, sour grapes into sweet syrup. We lose the true flavor of the grape if we eat it before it has ripened.

Crazy Husayn and The Beginning Of Wisdom

There was once a man called Crazy Husayn Hodja. On the night of this man's wedding, two scholars, who had come to perform the marriage, settled down in the midst of the festivities to hold a friendly discussion on some religious topic. Husayn Agha was fascinated by their conversation. "Tomorrow at the latest," he told himself, "I must go and acquire knowledge. I must become learned like these gentlemen, so that I can participate in such friendly discussions." Ruefully he reflected: "How awful to be so ignorant. I am twenty years old and I have just got married. But what's the use? I know nothing about anything!" He turned to the scholars when they had finished their discussion, saying: " Learned sirs! W here did you acquire this knowledge? Where did you learn to converse so politely? My friends and I sometimes talk together, but all we do is bandy rude insults. You haven't offended each other or said a single bad word." One of the scholars replied: "This is learned discussion. Such conversations are conducted without cursing, rudeness or quarreling. Such friendly learned discussion is a garden of Paradise. It is because you speak of anything but Allāh that your conversations end up in angry insults and squabbling."

The marriage ceremony performed, Husayn Agha entered the bridal chamber. All his thoughts, however, were on setting off for Istanbul first thing in the morning to begin his studies. He got up at dawn, performed his early morning prayer, then took to the road after saying to his wife: "Look, Fātima. There are sheep in the pen and cows in the byre. The garden and orchard are yours as well. I am off to Istanbul to acquire knowledge. I shall come back as soon as I complete my studies. Don't mention my absence. First to Allāh, then to you I entrust my mother and sisters. Sow, reap and work hard. I'll soon be home again." When he reached Istanbul, he entered the school which was then regarded as the cradle of knowledge. For thirty whole years he devoted himself to learning.

He plunged himself so deeply into his studies that he never spared a thought for his village, his district, his garden or his wife. Allāh gives knowledge to those who wish for it and wealth to those He wills. Although he was twenty

years old Husayn learned the Qur’ān by heart and at the same time graduated to advanced studies.

Years later—now at the age of fifty, with his hair and beard turning grey, he was at last a scholar, receiving his final diploma. He set out on the road home. After a journey of twenty days, as he was making his way to a village where he would spend the night before traveling the last day’s distance home, he encountered an old man working in his field and gave him a greeting. The villager acknowledged his salutation, saying: “Stop a moment, sir, and wait for me. I saw you before you entered the village, so you are my guest.” The scholar accepted this invitation, saying: “Yes, I happened to meet you first. I shall be very happy to be a guest in your house.” The villager finished his work, then they set off together for the village in his ox-cart. After eating a meal in the house, they went out to the mosque for the night prayer. After the prayer, Husayn Hodja got up to preach a sermon. He delivered counsel and advice. His sermon was so moving that everybody in the mosque listened to this learned scholar with great attention. In fact, the hodja had the people marveling at him. There was a festive atmosphere in the village. They seldom saw a learned man in those parts. The congregation made the most of this opportunity, taking the hodja to the village cafe after the sermon and treating him with honor and respect. Those with problems in religious matters had their problems solved.

At length they got up and went back to the villager’s house. Before they went to bed, the villager asked the hodja: “Sir, was it your father who caused you to study? If so, may Allāh be pleased with him for giving us Muslims a scholar like yourself.” At this Husayn smiled, remembering what had actually happened to him and what had led him to go and study. “No,” he replied: “My father died when I was small. I can hardly remember him. Being an orphan, I was not able to study. At any rate, not until I was twenty years old. It was a learned discussion between scholars in my house on the night of my wedding that encouraged me to study. I went to Istanbul the

very next day and there carried out my intention to acquire knowledge. It is now thirty years since I left my village, thirty years I have spent in study. I left my village when I was twenty and I am going back there now at the age of fifty." Tears came to his eyes as he spoke these words. He wept as he recalled his life before and after he set out to study. "I admire you for it," said the villager, adding: "Would you permit me to ask you a question?" "Of course," came the reply. The villager then asked:

"In the light of your thirty years of study, what is the beginning of wisdom?" "O, villager," said the hodja: "The beginning of wisdom is the prayer: 'My Lord, perfect me in goodness.'" But the villager said: "No sir! That is not the beginning of wisdom." The hodja then recited the letters of the alphabet, but the villager said again: "That is not the beginning of wisdom either." The hodja then said: "It is 'In the name of Allāh.' " "No," said the villager: '"In the name of Allāh' is not the beginning of wisdom either." The hodja next conjugated an Arabic verb, but only to be told that this was not the beginning of wisdom. He then said: "It is the opening Sūra of the Qur'ān." This was not it either. The hodja gave up at this point, saying: "Brother villager, in that case you can teach me the beginning of wisdom." This time the villager said with a smile: "How can I teach you in one night something you have not been able to learn in thirty years?" The hodja said: "I shall do whatever is necessary in order to learn," but the villager said: "I wonder whether you will accept my condition? In only one more day you will return to your village and the wife you have not seen for thirty years. However, in order to be able to teach you the beginning of wisdom, you would have to stay with me for one year. I don't know whether you have the patience for that." "Naturally," said the hodja, "I am homesick after all these years. Be reasonable, do not keep me here for a whole year, but tell me the secret right away." "No," replied the villager, "it is impossible to teach you in less than one year something you have not been able to learn in thirty. Still, since you are an intelligent man with a love of learning, I promise to teach you in one year. There are people who can neither learn nor be taught the beginning of wisdom in fifty, sixty or

even seventy years.” The hodja could argue no more and finally said: “Very well, then.”

The next morning the villager said: “Come along, put your boots on and pick up the shovel. Off to the field to work.” He labored there until evening and the villager gave him such hard tasks to perform that the hodja came home exhausted, ready for bed as soon as he had performed his prayer. Early in the morning, he would be on his way to work in the fields once again. He went through a year of real suffering with the object of learning the beginning of wisdom. In fact, the hodja had never had such a hard time in his entire life. Whenever he said: “Why don’t you just tell me what the beginning of wisdom is?” the villager would reply: “All in good time.” And so a whole year went by.

The hodja approached the villager saying: “Come now, tell me the beginning of wisdom. The year is up this evening.” When the villager said: “I shall tell you tomorrow morning as you are leaving,” the hodja exclaimed: “ For the love of Allāh, is it so short?” “Yes,” replied the villager. “It is quite short, or rather it is short as far as the telling is concerned, but from the point of the meaning, it is very long indeed.”

Morning came, they performed the prayer, supplications were offered, the soup was drunk. Then the villager called to his wife. “Hey there, we are sending the hodja on his way. Make him something for his journey. Give him some of your dried curds and flour to take to his family.” The hodja could not restrain himself any longer and he cried: “Never mind the dried curds and flour, teach me what the beginning of wisdom is supposed to be.” The villager became serious as he told the hodja: “The beginning of wisdom is patience. Yes, patience is the beginning of wisdom and that is all I have to say.” The hodja lost his temper and felt really annoyed. He knew such beautiful Traditions and many Qur’ānic verses on the subject of

patience. How many times had he counseled patience in his sermon and advice? Now to his extreme annoyance, he found that he had wasted a whole year of his life for nothing but these three words. He had put up with all kinds of suffering, supposing that he was going to learn something really important. Turning to the villager, he said: “I just don’t know what to say to you. You’ve kept me here for the whole year for the sake of these three words. Have you no conscience, religion, faith or fairness? May Allāh give you what you deserve. I know these things at the highest level. Allāh, Allāh, there is no power or strength except with Allāh!” He simply could not stomach the joke the villager had played on him.

At this the villager said: “My son, why are you angry with me? When I asked you a year ago, ‘What is the beginning of wisdom?’ were you able to tell me that the answer was patience? You could not; you said: “Teach me.” I told you my condition and you accepted it. Do not imagine that I was in a position to tell you then and there that patience was the beginning of wisdom. On the contrary, I began to teach you this a year ago. Throughout the whole year I have been teaching you at every moment what the thing called patience is and how one must be patient in order to learn anything. I actually made you experience patience. Then at the end of your year I told you in words that the thing called patience is the prerequisite for all knowledge. The contempt you offer me in return proves that the knowledge you acquired in thirty years was nothing but words. It seems that you have not applied your knowledge to yourself. You tell me that you know many Qur’ānic verses and Prophetic Traditions about patience and that you have given countless sermons on the subject, yet it appears you do not really know what the thing called patience is. If you did know, you would not behave like this towards someone who has really made you taste and experience knowledge in action. You would not speak to me like this. Do you know what harm can result if a person acquires knowledge merely on his tongue without taking it to heart? One can derive no profit from knowledge acquired in this manner. For instance, if a person studies and learns that telling lies is far worse than many bad deeds and yet continues to tell lies himself, he demonstrates quite plainly that he has not benefited

from what he has learned. If there had been any real benefit, he would have abandoned falsehood. To learn such things and talk about them without taking them to heart and putting them into practice is not just useless but positively harmful. It is one thing if the harmful consequences are confined to the person himself, but the real damage is done to other people, in particular to those who pay attention to him as a learned man—a teacher. If you preach against lying, quoting Qur'ānic verses and frightening Traditions about the terrible punishment it will earn, and yet tell lies yourself when you are out of the pulpit, the people will at first be amazed at the contrast between your words and your actions. Later they will start to question whether there is any base or foundation to the Verses and Traditions you have quoted to them. Allāh forbid that their faith should descend to such doubt and suspicion. The people are convinced that the hodjas who teach them about these things must certainly know better than they themselves. They think of themselves as ignorant people. They have no possibility or opportunity to study and learn the commands and prohibitions of Allāh directly. They depend upon what their hodjas teach them in their sermons. Now here we have a hodja who tells them about all these terrible punishments for lying. Yet he tells lies himself. If the punishments really existed, they will think, surely the hodja would try to protect himself before us and would keep himself away from falsehood, even before attempting to turn us from it. They are bound to come to the conclusion that your behavior proves that no such punishment exists and they will get into a condition of faithlessness.

"Can you imagine the retribution in the sight of God awaiting a man who poses as a scholar and so causes these people to become unbelievers? Especially if that man writes books, he will lead all those who read them into error.

"This is what patience is all about. If you really wish to be a scholar, you must first of all apply everything you learn to yourself. Only then should you preach to the people on the subject. Come then, I forgive you for the

things you have said to me. There are also many things for which I must ask your pardon. So, go back to your village and teach the people. Let your knowledge not be wasted."

The villager appeared to be nothing more than a simple man, but in reality he was a spiritual guide. He was a perfect man. He was one of the saints of Allāh. In the guise of a villager, he was showing people the way of truth. Of course, only the fortunate ones.

Husayn Hodja had been destined to study for thirty years before meeting this spiritual guide only one day's distance from his village. Only after spending another year under the direction of this guide had he been able to digest the knowledge he had acquired during those thirty years. Thanks to him, he had learned that verbal knowledge must be converted into practical knowledge, otherwise, there is no difference between a scholar and an animal loaded with a pile of books. And so he finally returned to his own village.

It was getting dark when Crazy Husayn Hodja finally reached his village. The village had changed. New houses had been built. A lot of things were different. He had difficulty in recognizing his own house. "Who was living there now?" he wondered. He had never given any thought to such questions. In all the years he had been away he never corresponded with his village. In all that time, nobody who could have given him news of home had ever been able to go to Istanbul.

Let me first peep in at the window, he thought. If I cannot see Fātima in the house, I shall go to the mosque for the night prayer and find out who is there. He went up to the window and peeped inside. His wife Fātima was sitting beside the stove. He recognized her all right, but there was a man

beside her. Who might he be? He took another careful look. Yes, he definitely recognized his wife Fātima, but she had a young man resting on her knee and was caressing his hair. They were talking and laughing together. The blood rushed to his head. This must mean that his Fātima had formed a relationship with another man when he went off to study; either that or she had married this man bigamously. Now they were enjoying the ownership of his goods, his field, his orchard and garden.

“This cannot be,” he said to himself, “I must protect my good name by taking my revenge.” He took out a gun he had brought from Istanbul for shooting pigs and pests, pointed the barrel through the window and took aim. He intended to shoot the pair of them and redeem his honor. It was as if he had forgotten everything he had learned in thirty years and gained nothing for himself from all the sermons he had preached; but just as he was about to open fire, he remembered that twelve months he had suffered for the sake of patience. “Stop, Husayn,” he said to himself. “What are you doing? You went through all that suffering for a whole year for the sake of patience. Have a little patience now.” Sticking the gun back in his belt, he went to a village inn opposite the mosque. The villagers had just eaten their evening meal and were sitting on the benches in front of the mosque in ones and twos, chatting before the night prayer. He went up to them and gave a greeting. The villagers saw from his clothes that a religious teacher was in their midst and stood up in response to his greeting. They asked this hodja, whom they did not recognize, where he had come from and where he was going. He replied that he was a traveler and asked the names of some of the villagers and old people to find out who was still alive. “There used to be a Niyazi Hodja here. Is he still alive?” he asked the villagers. “He had been dead these past twenty years,” they told him. When he asked about the gallant °Umar and Ghāzī °Uthmān, they pointed out a young man, saying: “That is Alī, the son of the heroic Ghazi, while that one there is the brave son of °Umar Agha. °Umar Agha himself is a very old man. He can no longer walk. Ghāzī °Uthmān is about your own age.” He mentioned a few other names and they told him that some were still alive while others had died. Then he turned the conversation to himself, saying: “There used to be

a Crazy Husayn here. He went off to Istanbul to acquire knowledge, I believe." "Yes," they said, "we did hear something of the kind, but there has been no news of him for thirty years." "Did he have a wife?" he asked. "Of course," they said, "she is alive. What that poor woman has not been through! The day after he married her and entered the bridal chamber, that fellow took off, saying that he wanted to study. He left the poor woman pregnant and she had such a difficult time bringing up that little child of his. She used to tell the boy, 'Mehmet, your father went away to study and never came back; perhaps he died, may his soul be happy.' She had the boy memorize the Qur'ān. There was a scholar in a neighboring village and she used to send the boy there. She had him educated. She got him married. Now Mehmet Efendi is our village Imām. He should be along shortly to lead the prayers." One can imagine the thoughts and feelings of Husayn Hodja when he heard all this.

Tears suddenly welled from his eyes. His heart missed a beat and then throbbed with emotion. The villagers were surprised to see the man weeping, but just then they saw the Imām. Crazy Husayn's son, Mehmet Efendi, had arrived. Crazy Husayn saw that this was the very same radiant young man who had shortly before been resting on the lap of his beloved Fātima. What a handsome, sturdy fellow he was! How right he looked in the outfit of an Imām!

He got up at once and joined the other villagers in returning the greeting of the Imām who was his own son. Then he could not res train himself any longer, and turning in the direction of the village where the true guide had taught him through experience the meaning of patience, he cried at the top of his voice: "Long life to you, villager; long may you live, Sultan. Long may you live, you blessed man." The villagers were quite bewildered and decided that the hodja who had come as their guest must surely be crazy.

Husayn Hodja turned and embraced his son. As he held him to his breast, he turned to the villagers and told them that he was Crazy Husayn, who had left them thirty years before. The villagers asked him a number of questions to find out whether or not he really was Crazy Husayn. When he answered all of the questions to their satisfaction and proved that he was indeed the man he said he was, one of the villagers said: “Excuse me, hodja, but what made you shout, ‘Long may you live, villager; long may you live, Sultan’ just now? Please explain to us and satisfy our curiosity. To tell the truth, your strange behavior has really aroused our curiosity.”

Husayn Hodja briefly related all that had happened to him with the spiritual guide in that village, a day’s distance away. Then he explained how the lesson in patience he had learned from that teacher had saved him from causing a tragedy in his own home. He told them that when he had learned the true situation he was so overjoyed that he spontaneously voiced his gratitude to the teacher and saint of Allāh who had given him that spiritual training. He had given a thousand thanks to Allāh for putting such a guide in his path and so preventing him from becoming the murderer of both his son and his wife.

All of those present were amazed to hear the hodja’s story and once again they testified to the greatness of Allāh. Most astonished of all was the son who had not seen his father from the day he was born. When he heard with the ear of his soul the story of this very important life experience, undergone at the end of so many long years by this gentleman whom he now knew to be his father, he regarded it as an instructive lesson for himself. At last the call to night prayer was heard and they all went into the mosque together, then, after the prayers, everybody accompanied him back to the house.

On his first day back in the village after so many years, it had been Crazy Husayn Hodja's fate to give a sermon far more moving and effective than any he could have delivered from the pulpit. Allāh had used his servant, Husayn, to teach all the people of the village an instructive lesson, as well as saving him from a calamity that would have destroyed him both in this world and in the Hereafter, granting him this great favor in return for his keenness and determination in the pursuit of knowledge.

Believer, there are certain people to whom we attach no importance, yet each of them is a hidden treasure. They are the kings of the Hereafter, the saviors of mankind. They hide their treasures by appearing to us in the guise of peasants or in the appearance of madmen or in some other form we consider insignificant.

The Donkey and the Ox

Two mullahs were going round the villages preaching and happened to stay as guests in the home of just such a spiritual guide. When one of the mullahs went out to perform his ablution, the villager who was their host said to the other mullah, "How learned is your friend; are his morals good? Are you happy about him?" The mullah replied: "Him? He's a donkey, an ignorant fool." Just then the mullah who had gone to do his ablution came back in and his companion said no more. A little while later, the second mullah went out for his ablution and the spiritual guide asked the other one the same questions about his friend. "For the love of Allāh," exclaimed the mullah, "he is an ox, an ignorant fool, quarrelsome and stubborn. What is there to like about him? Still, I have fallen in with him and become his friend."

This was a well-matched couple. Since one of them was a donkey and the other an ox, they did not clash. Had they both been donkeys or both oxen, what would have happened then? … When evening came and it was time to break the fast, three covered dishes appeared on the table. The villager set one dish in front of each person. The cannon signaled the time to break fast. They lifted the lids and what did they see? In front of one of them was barley and in front of the other straw; while in front of the villager-teacher was a plate of scrambled egg and butter.

“Please eat,” the villager told them, “come along, why don’t you eat up?” The mullahs looked at each other in amazement, but the villager pressed them to eat and eventually added: “I made no mistake; I asked your friend about you and he called you a donkey, so I served you barley.” Then, turning to the other, he said: “I also asked your friend about you and he told me you were an ox, so I served you straw. That’s how I discovered the identity of each of you from the other. Barley is fodder for animals. I have provided it in your honor. As for myself, being a human being, it is our lot to eat things like eggs.”

A man rises as high as he raises his friend or colleague. Anyone who finds himself despised by another should endure this with patience. He should not sink to the level of the one who despises him by despising in return. If a donkey kicks you, will you kick the donkey back? In that case there would be no difference between you and the donkey, for it kicked you because it is a donkey and you have done the same to it. You have fallen to the same level. If a dog should bite you, would you bite the dog back? If you would, then you are no different from the dog.

Do not let yourself kick the donkey or bite the dog. Do not be one of those who are human in appearance but really donkeys or dogs! Whatever bites you or kicks you will certainly be punished by your Lord, provided you are

patient and resist the temptation to kick or bite back. Be forbearing, long-suffering and patient and you will attain great rewards at the coming Resurrection. You will be able to enter Paradise without interrogation or reckoning.

VIRTUE OF SELF-RESTRAINT

When the Day of Resurrection comes and all creatures gather on the plain of °Arasāt, Allāh will have a crier call: “Let the people of virtue come! As a group makes its way toward Paradise, the angels will approach from behind, saying: “What good deed earned you this bounty? Everybody is at the reckoning in the Place of Resurrection. They are all crowded there, barefoot and naked. How can it be that you are on your way to Paradise without having to undergo those ordeals, those troubles, that conflict and contention?” They will reply to the angels, “We are the people of virtue. We bore with patience the wrongs done to us and pardoned our oppressors. We did not retaliate against those who insulted us. We were patient. We spoke well of those who spoke ill of us. We did not despise those who despised us, but forgave them their offense. We treated them kindly. We bore with patience whatever misfortune befell us, recognizing it as from God, and gave thanks to our Lord.” Then the angels will say to these people of virtue,

“Go forward, Paradise is yours, for the Exalted One has promised it to you.” These noble beings will reach Paradise and enter it to enjoy a delightful existence and endless bliss while everyone else is suffering the painful ordeal of reckoning.

O people of faith, if you wish to attain this blessedness and to enter Paradise while everyone is at the reckoning, endure with patience the misfortune that comes from God. When people despise you, be patient, even when it lies

within your power to crush them. Control your anger, exercise forbearance, be gentle so that the Exalted One may graciously make you one of those who achieve this bliss. Amen.

When the Resurrection comes, may you be happy and attain this bliss; may you be immersed in endless joy. Restrain your anger and rage; repel your fury by taking refuge with Allāh. Whenever you get angry, remember the boundless favor the Lord God has promised to those who are patient. Remember the behavior of the Messenger and give up your anger. Recall, also, that God's punishment is very severe for those who do not forsake their anger and hold on to their grudges; the divine punishment will be unbearable. Do not seek to avenge yourself on those who insult you. Think of Allāh and remember Him, for God, Exalted is He, said: "O son of Adam, remember me when you get angry. Be patient. Do not seek revenge, so that when I get angry with you, I may remember you and pardon your offense." Allāh gives this grim warning to those who seek revenge by telling people the fault of someone who has angered them: "O son of Adam, pardon the offense of one who hurts and offends you and arouses your anger. Do not try to abase him in people's eyes by publishing his hidden secrets. If you should resort to such tactics, do not forget that you also have many faults of which to be ashamed before other people. Do not have Me abase and disgrace you publicly by bringing out your offenses in this world and the next."

If you wish to be delivered from your own lower self, then do not disgrace a person who has annoyed you by revealing his faults. Anyone who publishes the failings of someone who has annoyed him will incur the punishment of Allāh. It can also happen that a person makes things up to discredit someone who has angered him. I wonder how Allāh will punish this sin? The Exalted One tells us that His greatest torment will be incurred by people like this, that is to say, by those immoral and unethical enough to slander innocent people. The earth itself prays to Allāh: "My Lord, You yourself cancel faults and do not throw your servant's failings in his face,

but here we have someone who, though he is a mere impotent mortal, goes around parading the mistakes of others and disgracing them publicly. Allow me to swallow up this tyrant."

If you are sitting down when you get angry, control your anger by standing up. If you are standing at the time, then sit down. Take refuge with Allāh from Satan. If your anger does not pass, take ablution and perform the prayer. If it still has not left you, lie down on your right side. You anger will then depart.

Whatever your enemy says about you, ask yourself whether there is any truth in it. If you do find that bad quality in yourself, then give it up. If not, then what is there to worry or get upset about?

Forbearance of Imām Ja°far

A man once said something improper to the venerable Imām Ja°far al-Sādiq, a member of the Prophet's family. The venerable Imām patiently refrained from answering. He also indicated to his friends that they should not interfere. That impudent fellow made off after saying all the bad things he could think of to the Imām. Sometime later, the Imām got up and made his way to the man's house. Seeing this, his companions fell in behind the Imām and followed him. They imagined that the venerable Imām was going to respond to the things the man had said to him. They were determined to protect the Imām should he be assaulted and to keep that insolent fellow in his place.

Imām al-Sādiq knocked on his enemy's door. When that impudent rascal came out, the venerable descendant of Muhammad said to him: "A little while ago you said certain things to me. I made no reply at the time. If the qualities you attribute to me are really in me, I give you my word that I shall repent them and not let myself be guilty of them again, but if the qualities you ascribed to me are not really in me, I shall pray to Allāh and beseech Him to pardon you. I forgive you what you said to me and do not hold it against you." This kindness made such an impression on the man that he fell at the feet of the venerable Imām, confessed his wickedness and repented to Allāh …

This behavior befitted a descendant of Muhammad, and Ja°far al-Sādiq acted accordingly. As a member of the Community of Muhammad, what befits you is to swallow your anger and pardon the person who annoys you.

Saint Ibrāhīm Ad'ham and the Aching Fist

To admirers of his splendid palaces, Ibrāhīm Ad'ham once said: "They will all turn to ruins. The true palace is the tomb which is earned only by those who construct it, for it will never become a ruin. I am not talking about the external tomb but about the construction of the inner tomb through good works." At that moment a fellow, who did not know whom he was dealing with, struck out at the saintly Ibrāhīm, saying: These fanatics are always finding some pretext." The other people present cried: "Alas, what have you done? That's the famous Ibrāhīm Ad'ham, Sultan of Balkh, who gave up his sultanate for the sake of Allāh and became sultan of the Hereafter. Ask his pardon at once. That man, who was a captain, took Ibrāhīm Ad'ham's hand and begged his forgiveness, but Ibrāhīm also took him by the hand saying: 'It is you who should forgive me, for your fist must be aching from hitting me in the face.' "

Did you ever see such patience, such gratitude? Patience, forbearance and magnanimity are the characteristics of the true believer.

The blessed Prophet said: “He who bears a grudge, has no religion.”

If you wish for salvation in the Hereafter, forsake malice, rancor and the desire for revenge.

Saint Bāyazīd and the Broken Stick

Somebody once hit Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī with a stick. The stick broke. The venerable saint took a new stick and a bowl of honey and gave them to the man who had struck him, saying: “Because of my face, your stick broke and you suffered loss, so here is a new one in its place and some honey for you to eat.”

It is easy to avoid giving offense but very hard not to be offended. The pious ascetic does not give offense, the saint does not take it. For what reason is there to take offense after one has realized that everything comes from God? This is the level of certain faith …

Saint Hallāj Teaches the Meaning of Magnanimity

A man was once seeking a spiritual guide who would really teach him the meaning of patience, contentment and magnanimity. He asked and made investigations everywhere. People told him that he should see a saint of Allāh called Mansūr al-Hallāj, whom he would find in Baghdad, and from whom he could learn the things he wanted to know. He, therefore set out for Baghdad, seeking for al-Hallāj. As soon as he arrived there, they told him that the person he was looking for was in prison, having been condemned for saying: “I am the truth” [“Anā-l-Haqq”].

The man visited al-Hallāj in prison, told him that he had traveled for three months to meet him and begged him to show him the real meaning of contentment, patience and magnanimity. The venerable al-Hallāj said: “Look, my son, my dear friends bring me a lot of food, but for the sake of Allāh, I distribute what they bring me among the poor people in the prison. All I eat myself is this dry bread dipped in water. I am content with this.” Turning to the question of patience, al-Hallāj spread his arms, escaped from the chains that bound them and made a sign to the wall. The wall split and an opening appeared in it. The visitor’s eyes almost popped out of their sockets at the sight. But al-Hallāj went on, “Yes, there is the question of patience. You see, I could escape through there but since the Sacred Law has imprisoned me, I shall patiently await my execution. As for magnanimity, that is a most important quality. I cannot teach you that today. You must come tomorrow.” The man came running to learn the meaning of magnanimity first thing next morning, only to find al-Hallāj hanging on the gallows.

Why had he not insisted that he teach him magnanimity the day before? This spiritual guide who had taught him in such a unique way the meanings of patience and contentment, said that magnanimity was the most important of all. Now he had lost forever the possibility of learning the answer from this very special man. “If only I had insisted,” he said to himself: “I would have found out about magnanimity, too.” What a great opportunity he had missed.

That night, however, he had a dream in which the Resurrection had begun. On this day of reckoning, everyone was waiting in fear and dread for the assistance of the intercessor, Muhammad, on him be peace. At that moment he saw the spiritual guide who had taught him patience and contentment, but who had passed to the Hereafter without teaching him about magnanimity, coming into the presence of Allāh, together with the judge who had sentenced him, for the review of his case. In this review, the judge who had ordered al-Hallāj's execution lost his case and was himself condemned by Allāh; but as the angels made a move to throw the judge into the fire, Mansūr al-Hallāj asked: "My Lord, what is my station now?" The answer came: "Since you have been ennobled with martyrdom, your station is Paradise." Then al-Hallāj made the following supplication: "Exalted Allāh, You, who have perfect knowledge of all things, including the desires of our hearts and the thoughts that pass through our minds! According to the principles of humanity in which you have instructed us through the medium of your beloved Muhammad, on him be peace, I can certainly not enter Paradise on my own, for I am ashamed to go there while abandoning to his dreadful punishment in Hell the judge who has been the means by which I became a martyr and gained admission to Paradise. How will I be able to look our Master, Muhammad, on him be peace, in the face? How shall I be able to identify myself as a member of Muhammad's Community? According to what I have learned on the path of Muhammad, the beloved of Allāh, either I should accompany the judge to Hell or he should be admitted to Paradise along with me. This is my request and supplication to You, in honor of the Messenger, my Lord."

Allāh, Glorious is He, accepted this plea in which His servant al-Hallāj had invoked His beloved Muhammad, permitted him to intercede on behalf of the judge and ordered his angels to take them both together into Paradise.

The man’s dream continued and he saw al-Hallāj and the judge arriving hand in hand at the gate of Paradise. Al-Hallāj paused to let the judge go in first, then turned as he entered himself and said to the man who wanted to learn about magnanimity from him: “Did you see? That is what they call magnanimity.”

“TIE YOUR CAMELS, THEN PUT YOUR TRUST IN ALLĀH.”

The venerable °Umar once said to some people sitting in the mosque: “Now is the time for work; why are you sitting here?” When they replied: “We have put our trust in Allāh,” the venerable °Umar said: “Have you sown your fields?” And when they said: “No,” he told them: “Go, sow your fields and then put your trust in Allāh.”

Addressing a different congregation, he asked: “Where have you tied your camels? When they replied: “O Commander of the faithful, we have not tied them. We left them untethered and put our trust in Allāh.” The venerable °Umar said: “Go, tie your camels and then put your trust in Allāh.” For ordinary people, trust has to be like this; for extraordinary beings it is something different.

Jevdet Bey and the Camel

A teacher of mine by the name of Jevdet Bey once decided to make the pilgrimage on foot. After visiting Damascus, he bought a camel and was just setting out on the road when a young Arab appeared and pleaded with him to be taken along as a servant. He would not take “No” for an answer and pestered my teacher until he was obliged to agree. He made such a

nuisance of himself on the journey that the venerable teacher eventually gave the camel and all his things, including his food and drink, to the young Arab, turned off the Hijāz road and started walking toward the desert. “I would rather die than travel with this man,” he said. “After six hours in the desert, I was near the point of death. I was so thirsty that I had to lie down somewhere. There was not a drop of water, not a patch of shade. The sun was in the sky and all around was sand. In a little while a camel came charging up to me. It stopped and stood at my side. A bedouin came up to catch the camel and was surprised to find me lying on the ground. Lifting me up and mounting me on the camel, he told me what had happened. ‘This camel belongs to me but somehow it escaped from the herd. After chasing it for hours, I reached this spot. Apparently, I was meant to save your life, but what can I have done wrong,’ he joked, ‘that I should have been forced to spend hours chasing after a camel?” When I told him my story, the bedouin was so amazed at this divine grace that he fitted out the camel, provided me with food and drink, and treated me as his guest for three days before showing me the pilgrim road.”

Here we have a living example of how a person who genuinely puts his trust in Allāh is never disappointed. My teacher is now giving religious instruction in Medina, the Illumined; may Allāh grant him a long and blessed life.

Those lazy people who are not at the level of genuine trust, but say they have put all their work in the hands of God, are a different species. They resemble the fox in the lion’s skin. When the venerable °Umar said: “Sow your field, then put your trust in Allāh,” and when he quoted the words of the Messenger, “Tie your camel, then put your trust in Him,” he was addressing this type of person. It is clear, however, that Allāh will not disappoint any servant of His who genuinely entrusts his affairs to His care.

PATIENCE & PRAYER

You who believe, seek help through patience and prayer. [2:153]

Patience and prayer are inextricably linked together in the noble Verse, because patience is the most potent of the body's hidden actions, while prayer combines the most important and varied expressions of external, physical worship. Patience is spiritual in character, while the prayer is corporal. Since the physical body has no value without the spirit, prayer is worthless if performed impatiently. The reward for that prayer will be lost through evildoing and the following of base desires.

Prayer is the Ascension of the believers. But we know from the Qur'ān that nothing is gained by one who performs the prayer heedlessly, that is without opposing the desires of the domineering self. On the contrary, those who pray in this manner incur the wrath of Allāh.

So woe to those who pray, but are heedless of their prayers; to those who make a show, but withhold the smallest charity. [107:4-7]

Torment and woe, therefore, to those who are heedless in their prayer, who do not guard against what is unlawful, that is to those who perform the prayer, yet also usurp what rightfully belongs to others by stealing from them; or to those hypocrites who keep up their prayers (so they imagine!) while at the same time they dishonestly and unethically perpetrate things forbidden by Allāh, lie and cheat, act unkindly toward animals and betray their fellow beings. We may understand from this noble Verse that the threat of Allāh's punishment and wrath extends also to those who pray and yet

withhold the kindness of which they are capable, even though they do not commit those wicked acts.

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In fact, as we said above, prayer is the Ascension of the believers. Ascension means rising up, ascending a stairway. To perform the prayer is therefore to climb rapidly up the steps of the ladder, discarding all bad habits, and to rise ever higher in ethics, morality and faith. Just as one cannot climb when carrying a heavy weight, the burden of bad habits prevents us from ascending the stairway to God's grace. For the top of this ladder of Ascension ends in meeting with God, to be united with Him in love and friendship.

The Messenger, on him be peace, has given us a bodily demonstration of this in his Prophetic Ascension.

If You Advise Others to be Patient …

One day, the venerable Sarī al-Saqatī was asked about patience. He spoke on the subject with words full of wisdom from the divine treasury. Just then it so happened that a scorpion stung his foot repeatedly; the venerable saint put up with the pain this scorpion caused him. He did not interrupt his talk. When people became aware of the situation and asked him why he had not moved his foot away from the scorpion, he replied: "I was discussing patience; I could hardly give you counsel and advice on that subject without being patient my self. I would have been ashamed before Allāh." By

stinging that saint the scorpion served to demonstrate how in the matter of patience the saints of Allāh really observe the divine command.

My Lord, make us, Your servants, patient in the face of divine afflictions; make us grateful. Let us control, rather than be controlled by our lower selves; let us enjoy Your forgiveness; grant us a good end and destiny; ennoble us at our last breath with the beauty of Your beloved. Let us die in faith; join us to the righteous lovers; make our souls intimate with the soul of Your beloved. Do not make us afraid at our last breath. Spare us from the agony of death, the loneliness of the tomb, the terror of the Place of Resurrection; from disgrace at the Reckoning, remorse at the Balance and calamity on the Bridge. May we be among those who look forward happily to death, whose tombs are a Garden of Paradise, who bask in the shade of the Throne at the Place of Resurrection, who receive their record from the right at the Reckoning, who achieve salvation at the Balance and on the Bridge, who are the first to be admitted into Paradise, who see Your beauty and attain union with You.

Grant us prosperity here and in the Hereafter; illumine our hearts and our faces. Make our bodies light, our virtue chaste and our morals pure. Fill our hearts with faith and our minds with understanding. Teach us to recite the Qur’ān and to remember You constantly. Grant health to our bodies; grant keenness to our sight, ardor to our breasts and delight to our hearts; honor us in our religion and faith …

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds … May our supplication be accepted!

NOTES

[1] Allāh tells us about these persecutions in Sūra 85 of His Noble Qur'ān.

[2] *Allāhu ahad / rasulūhu Ahmad*

[3] See p. 86

[4] See, e.g., the story of "the Companions of the Trench" [ashāb al-ukhdūd] in Qur'ān S.85

[5] as-sabru miftāhu-lfaraj

[6] lā ilāha illā-llāh / Mūsa kalīmu-llāh

THE FOURTEENTH DISCOURSE

Absolution

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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THE NIGHT OF ABSOLUTION

How blessed is the night of Sha°bān Fifteenth. This blessed night is called the Night of Absolution. It has five special features:

1. “Every wise command is clarified.”

2. Worship and obedience are particularly meritorious.

3. Divine mercy comes overflowing.

4. Divine forgiveness is forthcoming.

5. As we shall explain, complete intercession is granted to the Messenger, on him be peace. The proof of this is that, on this night, there is a noticeable increase in the Zamzam water at the Ka°ba. This extra supply of water

comes about by divine custom. On this night, the entire Community of Muhammad is graced with divine pardon, except for those heedless ones who turn away from Allāh and flee as if from a rogue camel.

(Excepted also are those who do not repent from drinking and fornication, who practice witchcraft and sorcery, who disobey their parents and who bear grudges. Nor is divine pardon obtained on this night by those full of hatred, who remain angry with a fellow believer for more than three days.)

We do not know which night is the Night of Power, for our Glorious Lord has kept it a secret from us; but He has graciously specified the middle of Sha°bān, the night of the Fifteenth, as a time when peculiar blessings are accessible to the believers. Our Master tells us in one of his noble Traditions: “The month of Rajab is the blessed month of Allāh. Sha°bān the Splendid is my month. Ramadān is the month of my Community.” Through the compassion of Allāh’s final Prophet, therefore, we know the mysteries of his own month, Sha°bān the Splendid; that divine mercy and sublime favor come overflowing, and that divine manifestations occur on the fifteenth of this month.

According to Nasr ibn Sa°īd, our Master had this to say on the subject of these divine manifestations:

“It was on the thirteenth night of Sha°bān that Gabriel came to me and said: Messenger of Allāh! Arise, for this thirteenth night of Sha°bān the Splendid is the time for vigil and prayer. It is a time when supplications are accepted, so ask Allāh to grant intercession for your Community. For this is your desire.’ I arose, therefore, and pleaded with my Lord for my Community until the break of dawn. Then Gabriel came down and said: ‘Good news, O Messenger of Allāh! The All-Glorious One salutes you. He has granted you

one-third of your Community.' I wept as I asked: 'O Gabriel, tell me about the two-thirds remaining. What has happened to them and what is to become of them?' But Gabriel replied: 'I can have no knowledge of their condition!'

"On the fourteenth night of Sha°bān, Gabriel came down again saying: 'O Messenger of Allāh! Arise, for it is the time for vigil and prayer. Beg God for your Community. This is a night when divine mercy overflows.' I arose, therefore, and begged my Lord for my Community till break of dawn. Gabriel came to tell me that I had been granted two-thirds of my Community. I wept as I asked: 'O Gabriel, what has become of the other third?' But he left, saying: 'I cannot know, O Messenger of Allāh!'

"Gabriel came down again on the fifteenth night of Sha°bān, the Night of Absolution, saying: 'Arise, O Messenger of Allāh! This is the Night of Absolution.' I arose, therefore, worshipped, and begged my Lord for my Community. Gabriel came down to say: 'Good news, O Messenger of Allāh! The Glorious Lord has granted you your whole Community. For your Community affirms His Unity. They do not attribute partners to Allāh. They proclaim His Oneness. Therefore He has granted you them all, through the light of "No god but Allāh" and through your intercession. You see by Allāh's favor to you and your Community what a blessed night this is. Look to the heavens; raise your blessed head. What do you see?' I looked and saw that the gates of heaven had opened, revealing another world. All the angels, from the first layer of heaven up to the Throne itself, were seeking forgiveness for my Community. At the gate of each heaven an angel was making proclamation. The herald in the first layer of heaven was announcing good tidings of forgiveness and Paradise, crying: 'What blessed good fortune this night for those who bow to their Lord!'

“The angel in the second heaven was calling: ‘Good news for those who prostrate themselves before their Lord this night. How fortunate for those who please their Lord!”

“The angel at the gate of the third heaven was crying: ‘Good news for those who remember their Lord this night!’

“The angel in the fourth heaven was calling: ‘How blessed and fortunate are those who pray to their Lord.’

The angel in the fifth heaven was giving good tidings to those who weep from love and fear of God: ‘Blessed the eye that weeps tonight from fear of Allāh.’ “This was the cry of the angel in the sixth heaven: ‘Good news for those who do good works this night!’

“As for the angel in the seventh level, he said: ‘Good news to the servants who recite the Qur’ān tonight! Then he cried: ‘Ask, ask of your Lord. Will no one ask? What is asked will be given. Make supplication. Your supplications will be accepted. Repent, that your repentance may be accepted and this bounty may be yours. Seek forgiveness, that you may receive pardon and absolution.’ ”

In another noble Tradition, our Master said: “On the fifteenth night of Sha°bān, the gates of mercy are open to my Community from the setting till the rising of the sun. On this night, those of my Community who deserve Hell, yet shall be delivered from the Fire, will far outnumber all the wool of the sheep of the tribe of Kalb.”

You see, believers! He who bows to his Lord on this night, is raised high. Paradise is given to those who prostrate themselves before their Lord on this night. The Lord remembers those who remember Him this night. Wishes are granted to those who pray to their Lord this night. Mercy is obtained by those who weep this night from fear of Allāh, because the Fire cannot touch the eye that weeps from fear of God. Neither ocean, river nor well can douse the fire of Hell, yet the tears of the eye that weeps from love and fear of Allāh are able to extinguish it.

When the Resurrection begins, all creatures will die, just as insects, grass and trees die in the autumn or the fall. Then Allāh will restore to life all the creatures that have died, just as grass and trees revive in the spring, and all the insects wake from sleep. Everyone will arise from his grave and go to the plain of °Arasāt, the Place of Resurrection. People will come there in three separate groups. The first group will be riding the mounts of Paradise and wearing the garments of Paradise. These are the Prophets, the righteous, the sincere ones, the lovers, the martyrs, the champions of the faith, the devout and the learned.

The second group will come on foot, driven along stark naked. When the Messenger, on him be peace, described this group, our Mother the venerable °Ā'isha asked: "O Messenger of Allāh, won't the men look at the women?" Replied our Master: "O °Ā'isha, such will be that day that no one will see another or be able to think of any but himself. Each person will be mindful of what he has done, weighed down by the sins he has committed. He will come into the presence of the Almighty laden with those sins, carrying his offending organs on his back."

… he will surely bear a burden on the Day of Resurrection. [20:100]

The third group will consist of the rabble who deny the resurrection after death, who ascribe incapacity to Allāh, asking: “Can this body be brought back to life once it has decayed and turned to dust?”, who forget they were created from a drop of liquid and who declare blatant hostility toward Allāh. When they rise from their graves, these unbelievers will ask such questions as: “What is happening to us? Who has brought us back to life?” And the angels will reply: “This is the day you were promised by Allāh, the All-Merciful, and of which you were informed by the Messengers: it is the Day of Resurrection, the Day of Assembly, the day when your shame is exposed. This is the Supreme Court and this is the day when the oppressed will be avenged on his oppressor. This is the day you once denied.” So saying, the angels will drag them from their graves and prod them to walk to the plain of °Arasāt. They will arrive at the Place of Resurrection groveling on their faces. When our Master described this scene, one of the Companions said: “O Messenger of Allāh, how will they walk on their faces?” and he replied: “As the legless snake or earthworm walks on its face.”

All mankind will assemble at the Place of Resurrection, there to be surrounded by angels of the seven levels of heaven and the seven levels of earth, in numbers known to none but Allāh. As for Hell, it will assault the people in all its fury, scorching them with its flames. Then, when all the Prophets fall to their knees, crying: “Myself, myself!” Muhammad Mustafā, Prince of the two worlds and beloved of the Almighty, will prostrate himself and clutch the trappings of the Throne, pleading in supplication to Allāh: “I do not ask for myself, for my Fātima, my Hasan, my Husayn or my °Alī. Let them all be sacrificed for the sake of my Community. My Community is all I ask for!” Gabriel will descend, sprinkling over Hell a little water from a vessel in his hand. The fire will abate, losing its former vehemence and terror. When our Master asks the nature of this water, Gabriel will say: “O Messenger of Allāh, this water consists of the tears shed by your Community from divine affection and fear of Allāh.”

So, good tidings to the eye that weeps this night from fear of God and love of Allāh! Its tears will have put out the fire of Hell.

Those who do good works this night are beloved of God. Those who recite the Qur'ān have spoken with Him. To those who ask, their wishes have been granted. The supplicant has been rewarded. The penitent has been pardoned. The sins for which he repents are as if they had never been committed. Those who seek pardon this night have obtained pardon and absolution.

Said the Messenger, on him be blessings and peace: "When someone repents for his sin, it is as if he had never committed it."

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ALLĀH IS EVER-ACCEPTING OF REPENTANCE

Repent for the evils you have done! The things God has forbidden you are bad and wicked. Repent while the bird of the soul is still in the cage of this body! Give up wrongdoing! Be a good person. May God, Exalted is He, have mercy on us all. Do not forget the bad things you have done, but shed tears as you beg your Lord's pardon for them. Do not tell other people about these bad deeds of yours. Do not make them witnesses. Speak to your Lord in your heart, in silent entreaty. Do not utter words. Let this exchange be unnoticed even by the angels, called Noble Recorders, who stand by us to write down the good and the evil that we do. Weep so much at night that

your tears wash away the writing in that record of sin. Let your sin-stained face be cleansed by your tears. Not even the angels should realize why you are crying.

Let this secret stay between you and your Lord. For we have been told that the sighs, moans and tears of one who regrets his sin are dearer to Allāh than the prayer of a worshipper. Tears certainly bring divine mercy to the boil. Allāh is Ever-Accepting of repentance. Even if sins outnumber the flecks of foam on the ocean, the grains of sand in the desert or the atoms in the sun … For it is certain that divine mercy is more than all of these. Surely the penitent will have his repentance accepted.

Sincere Repentance Saves a Brigand's Soul

There was once a man in days before Islam who had heartlessly murdered ninety-nine people. Then, he felt remorse. He went to a learned man and told him about his past, explaining that he wished to repent, reform his bad conduct and become a good person. "I wonder if Allāh will pardon me?" he asked. For all his learning, the scholar was a man without wisdom who had not been able to digest what he had learned. "You will not be pardoned," he told the brigand. "Well," said the latter, "if I am not to be pardoned, I may as well kill you." And kill him he did. He then found another worthy individual and told him that he had killed a hundred people. "I wonder," he said: "whether Allāh will pardon me if I repent?" Being a wise man, the worthy individual replied: "Of course you will be pardoned; repent at once. I have just one piece of advice for you: avoid the company of wicked men and mix with good people, for bad company leads one into sin." The man expressed repentance and regret, weeping as he sincerely implored his Lord to pardon him. Then, turning his back on bad company he set off to find a neighborhood where righteous people lived. On the way, his appointed hour arrived and he died. The angels of punishment and of mercy came to take

away his soul. The angels of punishment said that as a sinful person, he rightfully belonged to them but the angels of mercy also claimed him, saying:

“He repented and had resolved to become a good man. He was on his way to the place where righteous people live, but his appointed hour had come.” A great debate ensued, and Gabriel was sent as an arbitrator to settle this affair. After hearing both sides he gave this verdict: “Measure the ground. If the spot where he died is closer to the good people, then he belongs to the angels of mercy, but if it is nearer to the wicked people, he belongs to the angels of punishment.” They measured the ground. Since the man had just set out he was still closer to the wicked, but because he had been sincere in his repentance to Allāh, the Lord moved the spot by His divine grace and brought it closer to the good people. That penitent servant was handed over to the angels of mercy.

If you wish to forsake bad habits, you must forsake bad company. If you want to give up drinking, for instance, start by giving up your drinking friends. If you want to give up gambling, stop frequenting the dive where it goes on and give up your gambling pals. Whatever bad thing you do, but could not do alone, give up the friends who encourage you to do it. First and foremost, however, you should appeal to Allāh to make you stop. He is Self-Subsisting and Capable of all things. So, if you do achieve the grace to repent, you should not give yourself the credit. Do not say: “I gave it up.” Acknowledge your repentance as a blessing from Allāh, and give praise and thanks to Him.

Likewise, if you wish for a blessing such as being able to pray, you should appeal to Allāh to admit you to His presence. Befriend those who perform the prayers. If you wish to be a good person, you should seek the company of good people. Model yourself on their behavior. If you wish to be loved

by God, be with those He loves. If a malodorous substance is put in a bottle, it will infect that bottle with its bad smell, which will linger even after the bottle has been emptied. Similarly, if lavender water or attar of roses is put in a bottle, the perfume will continue to diffuse from it even after it has been emptied. You will be influenced in much the same way by the habits of good or bad company. When you are with good people you should learn goodness from them. The chief of the good is Muhammad, on him be peace. The chief of the bad is Satan. Take refuge from Satan with Allāh, for you cannot become anything on your own. If you really want to become something, be with those who are there already and learn from them what you want to become. As the saying goes: “The jug won’t fill itself from the spring, though it stands beside it for forty years.”

Measure yourself; weigh yourself! … Come to Allāh in time, or you’ll be sorry later … Your end is death; then comes the tomb; then the Resurrection; then either Paradise or Hell …

Allāh has created the Fire, and some deserve to go there. He has created light and Paradise, likewise deserved by some. Do not forget the sin you have committed! But do forget your good deeds and your worship. Rely on Allāh, not on your worship. No amount of worship can ever repay God’s favor toward you. As Sheikh Sa°dī says, even breathing in and out are two divine bounties. You may thank your Lord in one of them, but you cannot do so in the other. But actually, thanks are due for every bounty. You are therefore lacking. It is your duty to worship, but since you cannot completely discharge your divine obligations through worship, do not be conceited about it; appeal to God and place your trust and confidence in Him!

WHO ARE WE THAT WE SHOULD FEEL SELF-RIGHTEOUS?

Our Master, the Sultan of the Prophets, is so superior in servanthood to all other worshipful servants that, if all the worship of men and angels were put in one scale of a balance and his were set in the other, our Master's would certainly outweigh the rest. Allāh announces his servanthood before his Messengership: "I testify that there is no god but Allāh, and I testify that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger." That is how we profess our faith. Yet notwithstanding all this, he sets us an example in his Prophetic prayers: "My Lord, I declare You free from all attributes of deficiency. I qualify You with the attributes of perfection. We have failed to worship You as You deserve, O Sole Object of worship, O Allāh to whom remembrance is due."

It does not make sense, therefore, to be conceited about our inadequate worship. The believer has no business relying on his worship. Rely on Allāh and put your trust in Him. We must always take refuge with Him, penitent and remorseful, mindful of our sins, imploring Him to grant us His pardon and to give us to His beloved.

Repent in all sincerity, that you may be lifted up!

A Highway Robber Becomes a Reformed Character

There was once a highway robber and brigand by the name of Fudayl. This man used to plunder passing caravans. He made no distinction between Muslims or Christians but forced everyone to hand over their clothes, provisions and money. He used to ask the people he robbed what city they came from and what work they did, writing down their addresses and recording the names of their parents. He had a notebook with a complete

record of how many people he had robbed and how much money he had taken from them. He believed in the Day of Resurrection. At night he would sometimes regret the things he had done and would pray, saying: “O Lord, on the Day of Resurrection they will all ask for what I owe them and, in return for the goods I have stolen and robbed, You will burden me with their sins also and will put me in the fire. I am dominated by my lower self. I cannot give up these wicked ways. Help me, deliver me from this wickedness.” Tears streamed from his eyes as he went on-. “My Lord, one day, with Your help, I shall go to the victims I have listed in this notebook and give them back what I took from them. I give You my word, my Lord.”

What can a creature do unless he receives the grace of Allāh? One day Fudayl heard that a great caravan was on its way. He and his bandits set an ambush in a narrow pass. He himself went up to the top of a steep hill where he lay in wait for the caravan. At that moment he heard a disembodied voice speaking without words. That divine voice said to him: “O eye watching the caravan, there is One who sees you. There is One who watches you. The One who sees you and who sees, hears and knows all things, is Allāh. O person observing the caravan, observe God’s good pleasure instead. You, who observe the caravan, must observe the ways of God’s beauty instead.”

Fudayl was dismayed; his hands shook and he trembled all over as he realized what he was involving himself in. At that point the caravan had entered the defile, where it was surrounded by Fudayl’s bandits. Fudayl hurried down from the mountain and at the sight of him, the travelers were more scared than ever. No one had ever succeeded in escaping from him. Everyone knew his reputation. A saint who was in the caravan recited this Qur’ānic verse to Fudayl, in a loud voice: “Be afraid of a day on which you shall return to Allāh.” Fudayl still felt weak from his recent experience. This verse struck him like an arrow. He cried to his men: “Withdraw, let the caravan go free.” Fudayl was weeping. What had happened to this man? The heart of this brigand had been harder than stone. No one had ever seen

him shed a tear. Now Fudayl was as peaceable as an angel; divine grace had indeed come to him. He apologized to the members of the caravan, begging them to excuse him.

Why was this man apologizing when he had not as much as bloodied the noses of the people in the caravan? Fudayl let the caravan go in safety, saying: “I beg you to pardon me for having frightened and distressed you. Then he gathered his bandits together and told them that what they had been doing was wrong, that wickedness would lead them to a bad end and that they would be disgraced in this world and the Hereafter. He could not restrain his tears and wept as he told them to repent to Allāh, to beg and implore Him to forgive them. Fudayl’s condition affected the others also.

If a preacher practices what he preaches, his lesson always affects the congregation. That is why they say: “Preach first to yourself and then to others.” His men also felt sorry for their bad deeds and repented. They dispersed and went away determined to become good people and to return to their Lord.

The venerable Fudayl went to his headquarters and took out his notebook. He went around from city to city, from town to town, giving back everything he had taken and begging the pardon of his victims. When the money was finally exhausted, he still owed a certain unbeliever a thousand gold pieces. He had to walk for three months to reach the man. He asked him if he had been robbed in such and such a place and the man replied: “Yes, it was at that spot that they took a thousand gold pieces from me.” The venerable Fudayl told him that the brigand who had taken that money was none other than himself. The man promptly grabbed Fudayl by the collar, saying: “Aha! That was up in the mountains, but this is the city. I am taking you before the magistrate to get my money back.” But Fudayl wept as he said: “Here you are grabbing me by the collar and asking for your

money. If we had met in the Hereafter, you would have taken my faith away from me. I came here to repay you what I owe. Would I have come with the idea of going before the magistrate? I came to you with the intention of escaping reckoning before any magistrate whether in this world or in the Hereafter. These words affected the man, who said:

“Very well then, let me have my thousand gold pieces.” Fudayl then told him: “I have distributed all the money that was left. My debt to you is the only one still outstanding. I have no money of my own, not even enough to buy bread, but I am ready to repay you your thousand gold pieces by becoming your bondsman and servant and doing any work you set me.”

Beside the man’s house, there was a huge refuse dump. Pointing to this, he said: “Level this out and use it to fill up this swamp. I want to see a perfectly level field here. That is your first job.”

The venerable Fudayl said: “In the name of Allāh!” and set to work. He worked and worked, he sweated and got tired. He worked for weeks and weeks but he would not have filled that swamp even if he worked for six months. He began to appeal to Allāh, saying: “My Lord, I have no strength or energy left. Grant me Your grace. I have turned back to You. I came here to earn Your good pleasure. You be my Helper.”

A wind arose, the earth trembled and the refuse heap was filled into the swamp, leaving a perfectly flat field. Fudayl knocked at the man’s door and said: “Sir, what you told me to do is done. The swamp is filled in and the refuse dump has gone.” “You must be joking,” said the man, “that job would take more than six months.” But the venerable Fudayl pointed to the smooth earth, saying: “If Allāh wills, it can happen in one moment, just look and see.”

The man looked and saw that the marsh was really filled in and that the refuse dump had disappeared. The two men went inside and sat down. The man said to Fudayl: “You must repay your debt to me in cash. That I have pledged myself. I shall therefore give you a bag containing a thousand gold pieces. When you hand them back to me, you will have paid off your debt.” “May Allāh be pleased with you,” said the venerable Fudayl by way of thanks. “Let me do whatever is necessary to settle my account with you.” The man went into an inner room, filled a bag with earth instead of gold, then brought it out and handed it to Fudayl. The venerable Fudayl accepted the bag, opened it with the words: “In the name of Allāh,” extracted exactly one thousand gold pieces and counted them out in front of the man. While this was happening, the man could hardly control himself. Without touching the gold coins, he exclaimed: “O champion of Allāh, let me kiss your hand. Teach me faith and Islam. I shall become a Muslim, too.” “What has happened to bring you to believe?” The man then explained: “I read in the Scriptures that, ‘if a person truly repents and is sincere in his repentance, should that person touch earth, the earth would become gold.’ When I went inside, I filled the bag with earth, then I gave it to you and told you it was gold. Now, look, that earth has turned to gold in your hands.” The man thereupon pronounced the profession of faith and was ennobled with true belief.

TRADITIONS CONCERNING THE NIGHT OF ABSOLUTION

On the Night of Absolution there are changes in the divine government. The records of good and evil are taken away and new ones issued. Our appointed hours, our sustenance and whatever misfortunes are going to befall us are fixed on this night, and communicated to the angelic agencies concerned. For instance, °Azrā’īl is informed of those who are to die in the course of the coming year. The angel of death will then visit them every day until the time appointed. This is the night when rain and snow, storm and

earthquake, fortune and misfortune are predetermined, i.e., made known to the angels responsible for them. Be it misery or happiness, our fate is settled on this night. Everything is duly allocated.

The following Tradition of the Most Noble Messenger is related by Imām °Alī, the Companion of the Prophet, the Waterbearer of Paradise, the Victor of Khaybar, the son-in-law of the Messenger, the willing, generous and faithful, may Allāh ennoble his countenance: “When Sha°bān Fifteenth arrives, spend the night in prayer and the day in fasting. In other words, bring the night to life with acts of worship and obedience and win divine approval by fasting through the day. For when the sun sets the Lord manifests through His Beauty in the heaven of this world, saying: ‘Has no one anything to ask of Me, that I may grant his request? Is there none to beg My pardon, that I may pardon him? Is there none to ask Me for his sustenance in this world and the Hereafter, that I may give him what he asks and grant him provision and happiness?”

According to the Tradition related by °Abdullāh ibn Mas°ūd, the Prophet said: “If anyone performs a hundred cycles of prayer on the fifteenth night of Sha°bān, reciting al-Fātiha once and the noble Sūrat al-lkhlās five times in each cycle, Allāh will send down five hundred thousand angels, each of whom will record his merit in a book of light until the Resurrection. I swear to Allāh, who has sent me as a true Prophet, that those who pronounce a blessing upon me on that night will receive a reward equal to that given to all the Messengers, Prophets, angels and men.”

If you have the means to arrange it, have the noble Hymn to the Prophet’s Birth recited on that night. Recite the Qur’ān and have it recited. Give alms in charity. Above all, recite the noble Hymn to the Prophet’s Birth. Spend money for the sake of the glorious Prophet. He will be informed of what you spend in his cause. He will know about the benedictions you offer him.

Love the Messenger as much as you are able, so that your faith may be complete.

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A Merchant Helps a Descendant of the Blessed Prophet

There was once in Baghdad a merchant who operated with very little capital. His capital was no more five hundred dirhams, but he was rich in the Hereafter. He loved the most noble Messenger more than his own life. Every day he would greet him with blessings and peace. His eyes were moist with love of him and his heart was aflame. One day he went to the noble mosque to perform the morning prayer. They prayed in congregation. Then made supplication with hands raised toward Heaven and faces looking at the ground. How moving was the morning prayer!

The birds were chirping, remembering their Lord; hearts were glad. The Qur'ān was recited. Just as the congregation was about to disperse, a man stood up and said: "I am a descendant of the Messenger. I have a poor daughter. I wish to marry her to a young man in accordance with God's command. In honor of my ancestors, please help me with the preparations. Being a Sayyid I do not accept alms and cannot receive zakāh. You will have to do this for me as a gift. My grandfather will make you happy in both worlds." That tradesman who loved the Prophet gave all his capital of five hundred dirhams to the descendant of the Messenger. He kissed his hands as if they were those of his beloved Prophet and then fainted. That night in the world of dreams he saw the Prince of the universe, may Allāh bless him and give him peace. Our Master smiled as he said to him: "My brave young fellow, I have received the gift you sent me. Now go to the City of Balkh where there lives a man called Tāhir ibn °Abdullāh.

Everybody knows him. Go to him and say: ‘The blessed Messenger salutes you and says that he is sending you someone he loves. He has commanded you to give me five hundred gold pieces.’”

The next morning the merchant related his dream to his wife. When he told her he was going to Balkh, she said: “Who will provide for us in your absence?” The merchant replied: “I shall tell my neighbor, the grocer, to supply you until I return. I will pay him as soon as I get back.” Then he went to the grocer and said: “I shall be away a few weeks. Please take care of our household needs until I get back. I shall settle with you on my return.” The grocer said with a smile: “My dear neighbor, light of my eyes, the same exalted being who is sending you to Tāhir ibn °Abdullāh in Balkh has also commanded me to look after your household until your return.” Evidently, the Prophet’s command had also come to him in a dream and he was happy. What a great blessing he had achieved!

The merchant set out on his journey and the venerable Tāhir ibn °Abdullāh met him when he reached the City of Balkh. “Welcome guest, sent by the Messenger of Allāh,” he said, adding as he took him to his house, “He who sent you to me has commanded your humble servant to treat you kindly.” For three days he was entertained and feasted as a guest then given five hundred gold pieces and escorted back to his home in Baghdad.

The Blessed Prophet Prays for his Community on the Night of Absolution

Our Mother °Ā’isha tells us: ‘The Prophet, on him be peace, was with me. We were lying together. But I woke up in the middle of the night to see that he was not at my side. He was supposed to stay with me that night. Where could he have gone, I wondered. I asked Our Master’s other wives, but he

was not in any of their houses either. Thinking he must have gone to his beloved daughter, I went to the noble Fātima's place and knocked at the door. 'Who is it?' said Imām °Alī. '°Ā'isha,' I replied. He opened the door, saying: 'Mother of the Believers, what are you looking for here at this time of night?' He was surprised to hear me say that I was looking for the Messenger of Allāh, as were Fātima and the two princes Hasan and Husayn, who also got up and came to the door. 'Are you sure he is not in the mosque?' they asked. 'I have looked there,' I told them. 'He is not there. Nor did I find him in any of the houses of his other pure wives.' Imām °Alī then said: 'In that case he must surely have gone to the cemetery of al-Baqī°.' We all went together to the Garden of the Grove, where we saw a light shining in the cemetery. 'This light is the radiance of the Prophet, on him be peace,' said Imām °Alī. We approached the light, to find the Prophet, on him be peace, weeping in an attitude of prostration. He had not even noticed our arrival. In his position of prostration he was making humble supplication to his Lord, saying: 'If You punish them, they are Your servants. If You forgive them, surely You are Mighty and Wise in all Your works.' Then he became aware that members of his household had arrived and he raised his blessed head from prostration. The noble Fātima said: 'O my father, you who are dearer to me than life itself, what has happened to you? Have you suffered injury at the hands of an enemy? Have they broken that heart of yours, which is mightier than the Throne? Or has a revelation come down to you from the Lord of all worlds?' The Messenger, on him be peace, replied: 'Nobody has harmed me. Nor has a revelation come down. But this is the Night of Absolution. Tonight I am asking Allāh for my Community.' Then he turned to me and said: 'O °Ā'isha, should the Resurrection start, you have found me tonight in prostration, asking my Lord for my Community, interceding for them and begging my Lord to forgive them.' The he turned to us all, saying: 'If you wish to please me, O people of my household, then be my helpers and prostrate yourselves along with me tonight. Offer prayers and supplications along with me.' We then prostrated ourselves also and wept as we begged and pleaded for the Community of Muhammad till the break of dawn."

Allāh accepts our prayers, if only our mouths are worthy to pray … Here is the translation of the prayer for that blessed night: “My Lord! If You have written my name in the register of sinners, erase my name from there and write it in the list of the fortunate, the good who are Your worthy servants. If I am recorded in the list of the fortunate ones, in the register of Your worthy servants, do not erase my name therefrom. For You say in Your Holy Book: ‘I am Allāh. I record whom I will in the list of sinners, and whom I will in the list of the blessed.’”

SPECIAL TIMES WHEN PRAYERS ARE ACCEPTED

The venerable °Abdullāh ibn °Umar says: “I heard from the blessed Messenger that there are five times when prayers are accepted, not rejected: i) an hour called the Noblest Hour, which falls during the night or day of Friday; ii) the tenth night of Muharram; iii) Sha°bān the Fifteenth; iv) the night of the Ramadān Feast; v) the night of the Feast of Sacrifice.”

A Personal Experience

What I am about to relate is something I witnessed personally, of that I most solemnly assure you. Some of us were sitting together in a religious gathering, one year on the night of the tenth of Muharram. The Qur’ān was recited for the sake of the soul of the venerable Husayn. For it was on the tenth of Muharram that his martyrdom occurred. A man in our midst was so grieved by the martyrdom of the venerable Husayn that he raised his hands and said: “My Lord, take my soul to him; join me to the martyr of Karbalā’.” He was a man in perfect health and condition.

We left the gathering and learned the following morning that the man had died. I was present at his burial. My reason for mentioning this personal story is to illustrate the truth of the noble Tradition according to which supplications made on the eve of the tenth of Muharram are accepted. The Community of Muhammad should take advantage of these five special times.

According to a Tradition cited in Zubdatu-l'Majālis, Abū Hurayra reports our Master as saying: "On the fifteenth night of Sha°bān, Gabriel came to me and said: 'O Messenger of Allāh, tonight is the fifteenth night of Sha°bān. Tonight three hundred of heaven's gates are open. Tonight three hundred of the gates of mercy are unlocked. Arise and perform the prayer. Worship your Lord. Raise your hands heavenward and make supplication. Ask your Lord for your Community.' 'O Gabriel,' said I, 'tell me about the special virtue of this night.' Gabriel then replied: 'O Messenger of Allāh, on this night prayers are accepted. On this night your Community is granted to you. On this night the ocean of mercy overflows. This is the night of forgiveness, the night of mercy. Tonight the entire Community enjoys forgiveness. Only from the following is pardon withheld: those who ascribe partners to Allāh; sorcerers who practice witchcraft; fortune-tellers who speak of the unseen; those who carry a grudge against a fellow believer for more than three days; those who do not repent for drinking; those who do not abandon fornication; usurers who devour interest; those who neglect their parents, despise them and fail to give them their due; and those immoral people who spread malicious gossip, causing one group of Muslims to fall out with another. Nor is pardon granted to those who abandon kith and kin and fail to give them their due. Apart from these, the entire Community has received pardon and forgiveness in honor of this night. Those who repent and forsake these bad habits may also enjoy the blessings of this night.'"

When the compassionate final Prophet heard this news from Gabriel, he tenderly performed a prayer for the sake of those members of his

Community who do not receive pardon. Tears streamed from his eyes as he reached the position of prostration, and he did not stop weeping as he pleaded with his Lord till dawn, saying: “O Allāh, I take refuge with You from Your chastisement and wrath. Grant me the disobedient of my Community also. Pardon and forgive them too.”

He weeps for us, though it is really we who should weep. Let us weep for the times, the lives, we have spent without Allāh. The shops are closing for the night, and the bird of life is about to fly from the cage of this body. This very night may be our last. Come! Let us see the Truth while our eyes still see. Let us hear the Truth while our ears still hear. While our tongues still speak, let us proclaim the Divine Unity and Oneness. Before we depart this body, let us worship Allāh standing, bowing and in prostration. Let us do good and noble deeds, so that we may achieve salvation and success.

Let us not covet another’s honor, life, good repute or property. Let us taste the delights of faith and Islam, earning by lawful means and using our lawful gains to help the poor and needy for the sake of Allāh.

Let us rescue ourselves from lying, hypocrisy, false witness and false oaths, from idleness, dirtiness, impudence and shamelessness, that we may become servants worthy of Allāh and a Community worthy of Muhammad. Let us not waste such blessed nights in heedless neglect.

My Lord, in honor of the Hāshimite Messenger, do not deprive us of this night’s grace!

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds…

THE FIFTEENTH DISCOURSE

The Blessed Day of Congregation

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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You who believe, when the call to prayer is sounded on the Day of Congregation, hasten to remembrance of Allāh, and leave business alone. That is better for you, did you but know. [69:9]

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SPECIAL YEARS, MONTHS, NIGHTS AND DAYS

Just as people are created superior to one another in intelligence, beauty, physique, wealth and lineage, so have certain months, weeks and days been endowed with a special excellence. It is the same with everything in this world. Trees, fruits, animals, rocks and soils … It is like this even with the grades of Paradise and the strata of Hell. The same applies also to degrees of sickness and of well-being. This state of affairs is evidence that Allāh exists, that He is Sovereign and that He creates everything as He wills. To heedless ones like us, it is a clear indication of the divine Oneness and sublime Omnipotence.

If the only source of creation was the power generated by the heat of the sun, the state of nature and the force of rain and wind, everything would necessarily be identical. As it is, the forty varieties of pear are all pears and the fifty sorts of apple are all apples, yet no two apples or pears have the same taste, color or smell. If food is boiled in the same pan, on the same fire and by the same cook, it all tastes the same. So how does a mulberry turn out sweet and a pepper spicy, even if both are grown in the same garden, by the same gardener, in the same soil, irrigated by the same water? Melons, watermelons, onions and so on, all have their own particular taste and

distinctive coloring. Here we have further evidence of the Power of Allāh, testimony to His Existence and proof of His Skill.

As we have said before, all things have been created different in kind and in degree, yet at the same time mutually interdependent. The lowliness and inferiority of one thing serves to demonstrate the value of another. The value of one thing shows up the true measure of another. The creation of night has enabled us to appreciate the daytime; the creation of the unbeliever gives significance to the believer's manifestation of faith; the creation of bitterness makes us aware of the value of sweetness. The wisdom of the wise is enough to show up the folly of the unbeliever. If no one were ever sick, who would appreciate good health? If captivity did not exist, who could realize the worth of liberty? Gradations, divine mysteries, things to be seen and valued by the wise, are matters of indifference to the heedless.

All this being so, there are distinctions of superiority among the years also. In a certain era, a special individual emerges, to become the glory of that age. For instance, we call the years when our Master graced this world "the Time of Felicity." Certain months are likewise ennobled, namely the blessed months of Ramadān, Rajab, Sha°bān and Muharram. The noble nights are the Night of Power, the Night of Absolution, the Night of Friday, the Night of Monday, the Night of the Prophet's Birthday, the Night of the Ascension, the Nights of the two Feast Days, the First Night of Rajab, and the Tenth Night of Dhū-l Hijja. These special distinctions are referred to in the noble Verse:

By the dawn and ten nights … [89:1]

Some are identified by Qur'ānic Verses, others on the basis of Traditions.

Turning to the days, those that are special include the anniversaries of the Battles of Badr and Hunayn and of the Conquest of Mecca; the birthdays of the Messenger, on him be peace, and the venerable Abū Bakr, °Umar, °Uthmān and °Alī; days of victory for Islam and the Islamic world; the two Feast Days; the Day of Contemplation, the Day of °Arafāt and the Day of °Āshūrā. This Day of °Āshūrā, the tenth of Muharram, had been a particularly blessed day. It was on this day that the venerable Jonah was delivered from the belly of the whale; that the Ark of the venerable Noah came to rest on Mount Jūdī, bringing his ordeal to an end; that Abraham was rescued from Nimrod's furnace; that the venerable Moses triumphed over Pharaoh and the Children of Israel were delivered from captivity; that Jesus was raised up to heaven. All these things happened on the Tenth of Muharram. But this same Day of °Āshūrā was also the day of martyrdom for the venerable Husayn, the grandson of the Messenger. It is therefore outwardly a day of sorrow for the believers, when they recall how Imām Husayn attained the rank of martyrdom at the tyrants' hands.

This day is both the day of completion, when the Station of Praiseworthiness was fully conferred upon the Messenger, on him be peace, though no other Prophet had been able to attain it, and the day of salvation for the believers who mourn the affliction of the venerable Husayn and his household. Outwardly a day of misfortune, it is in reality the day that marks the sacrifice made by Imām Husayn in order to teach the Community not to obey tyrant or tyranny and, if need be, to offer one's life in this cause.

Blessed nights outnumber blessed days. One of the greatest of all days is the day of Friday Congregation, which is called "the Prince of Days" [sayyid al-ayyām]. As for the best part of the morning, it is the time of forenoon, when the blessed Messenger was born:

By the bright forenoon … [93:1-2]

SPECIAL MERIT OF FRIDAY, THE DAY OF CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

Friday is specifically mentioned in the Qur’ān as being a blessed day. There is a moment during Friday when bliss is available to those who do not let it pass unheeded. Because of this, the noble Companions used to go early to the mosque on Friday long before the time of congregational prayer, racing each other to catch this blessed moment.

The practice of going early for the Friday prayer was the first of all the acts of worship and exemplary habits to be abandoned in Islam. The Muslims introduced the first bad innovation in Islam when they started turning up late for prayers on Friday and began to waste this day in heedless unawareness of its special virtue.

Friday prayer is the poor man’s Pilgrimage. The merit of Pilgrimage awaits any Muslim who believes in it, makes full ablutions and attends the Friday prayer in clean clothes.

Any child born on Friday is blessed with good fortune in honor of the day. Our Master, the Most Noble Messenger, informs us that any true believer who dies on Friday, dies as a martyr. This we know from the following noble Tradition: “He who dies on the Day of Congregation,” said the blessed Prophet, “dies a martyr.”

In His wisdom, the Lord created this universe in six days. He began His work on Sunday and finished it on Friday. On Friday, the venerable Adam was given his soul. It was on a Friday that the venerable Adam's repentance was accepted in the court of the Almighty. The venerable Adam was created on a Friday, and on a Friday he died. The Resurrection will start on a Friday. On a Friday the Trumpet will sound.

According to Aws ibn Aws, the Messenger of Allāh, on him be blessings and peace, said: "The most excellent of your days is the Day of Congregation."

Addressing his noble Companions one day, the Messenger, on him be peace, said: "Salute me often on Friday, for such is the virtue of Friday that the benedictions you make on that day will be presented to me." The Companions asked: "Are we to go on wishing you blessings after your departure to the Hereafter?"

"Yes, do so!" he replied. Then they asked: "How will our benedictions be able to reach you, when your body has decayed and turned to dust?" To this, our Master, the pride of Adam replied: "How can you ask such a question? Do you not know that the Glorified and Exalted Lord has forbidden the earth to consume the bodies of the venerable Messengers?"

Seven groups of people do not have their bodies consumed by the earth:

i. The Messengers, on them be peace.

ii. Just rulers and judges.

iii. Sincere scholars, who act upon their knowledge.

iv. Martyrs, who give their lives that the word of Allāh be exalted.

v. Those who give the Call to Prayer for the sake of pleasing Allāh.[1]

vi. Those who are buried in chemically treated soil.

vii. Those who are under a curse. (People like Pharaoh, e.g., Ubayy ibn Khalaf and Abū Lahab.)

Notice that just rulers and judges, though far from being Prophets, obtain the divine favor of having their bodies preserved from decay. Be just in all your dealings! We know on the strength of noble Tradition that Allāh would rather have us act justly for one hour than spend sixty years in supererogatory worship.

If you are a scholar, put your knowledge sincerely into practice! You will obtain a great reward. Be fearless in defense of what you hold sacred! If you fall a martyr for Allāh's Messenger Muhammad, the Qur'ān, Islam and your country, you will not die! You will gain eternal life and the bounties of Allāh … You will attain the highest station.

ETERNAL LIFE FOR THE MARTYR

For martyrs there is no dying. They are eternally alive. The Noble Qur’ān tells us they are sustained at the side of their Lord.

Mustafa Pasha, the heroic commandant of Silistria, just stood and wept when he was awarded the rank of Vizier. He said later: ‘I was expecting the rank of martyrdom, not the rank of vizierate.” As he believed, the ministries of this world will come to an end, while the ministry of the Hereafter is everlasting. He was to have his wish. A shell exploded as he was performing his ablution, intending to stand and pray in the divine presence, and the enemy’s shrapnel enabled him to attain his goal. He achieved the rank of martyrdom. Such examples have not been rare in our history.

A Young Man Finds A Bride In Paradise

In the City of Basra, there once lived a wealthy family. Only Allāh knew how much they were worth, but Allāh had not granted them a child, neither girl nor boy. A child was the one thing they most wanted in this world. In order to attain this desire of theirs, they made many prayers and were abundantly charitable to the poor and the weak. After some time, the Exalted One granted them a fine male child. It was as if the moon had come down from the sky and entered their house. He was as beautiful as the venerable Joseph. His mother and father were delighted. They gave thanks to Allāh and offered alms and banquets to the needy as a further expression of their gratitude. After some time, as all mortals must, the father went to join the mercy of Allāh and was left alone with his deeds. The beautiful child now had no one but his mother in this fleeting world. He grew day by

day, getting ever more handsome. He became so good looking that anyone who saw his face would fall in love with him and would not want to be apart from him. Pregnant women who saw his face would suffer a miscarriage. His beauty had become a temptation. Eventually he took to going around in a mask. When he came of age to marry, all the wives of the important citizens of Basra were keen to offer their daughters in marriage but these girls were no match for him in beauty. His mother told these applicants, “I shall not let my son marry a girl unless she is more beautiful than he.” The chief citizens got together and approached the boy’s mother, saying: “Madam, no girl more beautiful than your son can possibly be found at this time. Where are you going to find a girl that beautiful? Look, our daughters are beautiful enough although they cannot compare with your son. Choose one of them for him and let us marry them. Consider his manhood, let him attain his desire.” But she replied, “No, I shall find my dear son a girl more beautiful than himself, even if I have to look for her in China.”

One day, as this lady and her son were going about some business, the people of Basra had gathered for prayers in the Great Mosque, where they were listening in ecstasy to the preaching of °Abdullāh ibn Zayd, may Allāh have mercy upon him, an heir of the Prophet and a most popular and respected scholar and saint. Mother and son performed their prayers and decided to sit down and hear his lecture. In doing so, they would certainly obtain their desires in both worlds. For here was an inheritor of the Prophet discussing the Book of Allāh and the life of the Messenger. The scholar sat sedately in the pulpit and signaled to one of the Hāfizes present that he should recite a Sūra of the noble Qur’ān. In an ardent voice the reciter began to read from Sūrat al-Furqān. The whole assembly held its breath. It had become like a single being.

And those who say: ‘Our Lord, grant us wives and offspring to be the comfort of our eyes, and make us a model for the righteous. These are the ones who shall be rewarded with the upper room in heaven, because of their

patient constancy, and shall meet there with welcome and peace. There shall they dwell forever; a lovely place to rest and stay. [25:74-76]

The venerable °Abdullāh ibn Zayd began interpreting this verse: “The Exalted Lord has created pavilions, palaces and tents in Paradise and these are suspended beneath His exalted Throne. Just as Allāh has created this world and the stars without support, so has He created these pavilions and palaces. They stand in space like clouds in the sky. The denizens of Paradise see these palaces just as people on earth see the stars … These pavilions, suspended in space, have three hundred doors, each door made of gold, worked with rubies and diamonds. They are more beautiful than anything our eyes have seen or our ears heard of. It is quite unimaginable. When the doors of these pavilions are opened, they rejoice in the sight of the blessed beauty of the noble Messenger, and Abraham, God’s special friend. A throne has been set in each pavilion, each throne laid with mattresses of light and with a stream running before it. The water of this stream is cooler than snow, sweeter than honey and more fragrant than musk. In front of each throne sits a houri and each houri is created from four different substances. She consists of camphor from head to breast, of amber from bosom to navel, of musk from navel to knee and of saffron from knee to foot. Each of them is clad in the garments of Paradise. Their clothes are made of cloth from the hundred layers of Paradise. Their varied colors and designs simply beggar description. The clothes they wear are so transparent that the beautiful bodies of the houries show through them, just as the string shows through prayer beads of ruby.

“Opposite each throne the servants and beautiful attendants of Paradise stand in an attitude of respect, holding censers from which they diffuse fragrant perfumes. Some of them are holding in their hands the jewelry the houries are going to put on. If one of those houries were to show her face to the world below, the light of her cheeks would eclipse both the moon and the sun.” When the boy’s mother heard the scholar utter these words, she got up, saying: “Nothing less than one of these houries will do for my son.

At last I have found the right kind of girl for him to marry." Then she turned to °Abdullāh ibn Zayd and said: "Imām of the Muslims, may Allāh bestow his mercy upon you. To whom does our Lord grant these beautiful stations and these lovely houries?" The scholar began to explain: "These beau ties are attained by those believers who give them their due." The woman interrupted to ask: "What is their due?" Then the scholar continued: "It is to refrain from committing sin in this world, to obey the commands of Allāh and to avoid doing the things He has told us not to do. It is alms-giving, charity and good deeds for the sake of Allāh. It is performing the night prayer. It is fasting during the day; it is sacrificing one's life in Allāh's cause; it is striking the unbeliever with the sword in order to exalt the word of Allāh and to defend virtue and sanctity. These bounties are granted to those who carry out these acts and pray by night and by day: 'our Lord, make our wives and children sure-footed in the religion of Islam, which is the right path, and make them obedient to us. Let them not commit acts at variance with Sacred Law. Let them die in faith and let us see them in Paradise. Let our eyes and our hearts rejoice and be filled with joy and light.' This station belongs to those who have an insatiable appetite for worship and who say: 'O Lord, guide us so as to make us leaders of those who fear Allāh.'

"The Prophet Elias wept and wept when the angel of death came and told him that it was time for him to take his soul away. The angel of death asked the venerable Elias why he was weeping. "There is nothing for you to be afraid of," he said. "Your station is Paradise." "Yes, I know," said the Prophet Elias, "the reason I am weeping is not that I must leave this world. I never tired of serving my Lord in worship. My death will mean the end of my servanthood. I shall not be able to serve Him like this any longer. That is why I am weeping. As a servant of Allāh, I have discovered such pleasure and delight in worshipping Him that even the bounties of Paradise can never compare, for in Paradise there is no worship." It is the station that will be reached by those worshippers, ascetics and lovers who, like the Prophet, never tire of worship. This station is 'in the Seat of Truthfulness.' This bounty will be given to such people." When he had finished speaking,

the woman said: “I accept these conditions of which you have informed us. There cannot be any station more beautiful or girl more lovely for the son of this sinner.” The lecture had finished. She went back home, took forty thousand pieces of gold and returned to the mosque with them. Handing them over to °Abdullāh ibn Zayd she said: “Imām of the Muslims, take these as your present for giving the good news in your lecture about Paradise and the houries. Take this money and use it to give alms to the poor and for good causes.”

Sometime later the call to arms was given. This announcement created a festive atmosphere among the believers. On all sides preparations were under way. The venerable °Abdullāh ibn Zayd gathered his dervishes and they also made preparations for the campaign. A big crowd assembled when the woman in our story came to the Sheikh holding her son by the hand. “Imām of the Muslims,” she pleaded, “let my son go on the campaign with you.” The venerable Sheikh agreed and they bought a fine horse for the boy. With a lance in his hand, a sword at his side, a helmet on his head and boots on his feet, the handsome youth looked like a lion. His mother shed tears of joy as she called after him, “I leave you in the care of Allāh; may your campaign be blessed; return soon and may the Exalted One take you to those fine stations and beautiful houries.”

°Abdullāh ibn Zayd continues the tale: “After crossing deserts and mountains, valleys and streams, we reached the Byzantine territory and encountered the foe. Unbelievers and Muslims formed ranks opposing each other. The Hāfizes began to recite the Qur’ān while the dervishes proclaimed the divine Unity at the top of their voices. The clamor of the affirmation and the cry of ‘Allāhu Akbar’ ascended to the Exalted Throne. Spurring their horses, the knights bore down upon the foe. Finally, the two sides were attacking each other with no quarter given. The believers’ cries of “Allāh, Allāh” and the unbelievers’ shouts of “Hurrah” were mingled together. Our handsome young warrior flung the mask from his face, held his lance between his horse’s ears and charged the front ranks of the infidel

army. Not even the veterans of many wars ever fought so heroically. He fixed his gaze on the heavens. Again and again he charged. He sought the rank of martyrdom. I became afraid. This was not the way to wage war. He was fighting as if bent on causing his own destruction. Running up to him, I cried: “My brave fellow, this is not the way to do battle. The conflict and the struggle are meant to drive the enemy from the field, but you are trying to sacrifice yourself. Do not charge so impetuously. Fight steadily, guarding yourself and conserving your energy. Protect yourself. Don’t rush on ahead of your comrades. You have not had time to learn the art of war. I fear some harm may befall you.’ But he replied: “My dear Sheikh! Anyone who saw what I have seen would be ready to sacrifice a thousand lives, if he had them.’ I asked him what he had seen, whereupon he told me joyfully: ‘When you preached to us that day in the mosque, we heard the wonderful tidings you gave, but we had not been able to see for ourselves. Now I see those stations you told us about. The blessed Messenger has opened his arms to me. Abraham, the special friend of Allāh, salutes me and calls me. No fewer than seventy houries are smiling at me from their heavenly towers, inviting me to come. “It is you, you we are waiting for,” they cry.’ My eyes filled with tears as I listened to the words of that gallant young hero. He immediately spurred his horse, gave a cry of: Allāhu Akbar, Allāh, Allāh!’ and plunged into the thick of the foe. Having scattered the enemy like a lion surprising a pack of jackals, he returned to my side and said: ‘It was you who taught me what a high rank martyrdom is. Can you be afraid of my falling a martyr? Would you grudge me this honor?’ My answer was to say: ‘Light of my eyes, I do not weep over your martyrdom. What grieves me is that Islam should lose such a champion. You will gain everlasting life. But you will be hidden from our eyes. Living heroes also achieve a similar station. The tears I shed spring from my envy of you.’ ‘No, no, my dear Sheikh,’ he cried, ‘I shall not forego this bounty. The life of this world can have no more appeal for me, now I have won this exalted favor. Look, they are calling me!’ The weather had turned very warm. He cast off his helmet and armor, flung his lance aside and took his sword in hand. With repeated cries of ‘Allāhu Akbar,’ he smote the enemy in a manner impossible to describe. He laid many an unbeliever low, dispatching to Hell the souls of the enemies of Allāh, the Messenger and the Qur’ān. The foe did not fail to notice the losses this hero was inflicting on

them, as he seized every opportunity to launch himself into their midst. They hemmed him in. Suddenly, hundreds of hostile swords and spears were smiting the brave young warrior. He was drenched in blood. At last, that abode-of-God was unhorsed. When the Muslim army saw this state of affairs, they proclaimed the Supremacy and Oneness of Allāh with a single voice. Then they hurled themselves against the foe. In this mighty struggle, that continued till late in the afternoon, blood flowed like the ocean and corpses piled up like mountains. At length the enemy was routed. It seemed as if victory had been awaiting that hero's martyrdom. The enemy scattered in disarray. I found that brave youth among the dead and wounded. He lay upon his back, his open eyes turned toward the Throne on high. He was soaked in blood and still bled from his blessed mouth. A blessed fragrance issued from him. His rosy cheeks had not yet paled. He was so radiant that my eyes were dazzled. His lips fluttered. I listened and heard him say: 'Lā ilāha illā-llāh.' Then he opened his eyes and looked at me. He pointed his hand toward heaven and smiled. He seemed to be saying: 'I have attained my goal.' I gathered that blessed martyr in my arms and buried him in an appropriate spot, using his blood for a shroud. Then I performed the funeral prayer."

That night, his mother saw her son in a dream. That young warrior had been seated on a throne, too splendid for any but Allāh to describe. His mother said: "What news, my own dear heart? How have you been treated by Allāh, Glorious is He?" And the martyr replied:

My dear mother, I have been given those beautiful stations and lovely houries. I have attained my desire. It seems the houries I had been given were ready to greet me the moment I fell a martyr. They promptly embraced me and bore me to Paradise."

You see, those who give their lives in Allāh's cause attain these high stations, gather the roses of Paradise and achieve divine favor. They enjoy the company of the Messenger of Allāh.

This Tradition is related by al-Hasan, may Allāh be pleased with him:

"The martyrs are alive in the presence of Allāh. Their souls are provided with sustenance and they rejoice in the spirit; just as the souls of Pharaoh's people were offered fire both morning and evening, so do they receive benefits."

This is what the Exalted Lord says about martyrs in His Noble Book:

Count not those who have been slain in Allāh's cause as dead. No, they are alive and being nourished in the presence of their Lord; rejoicing in the bounty Allāh provides them with; happy for the sake of those who have not joined them but are left behind, that on them is no fear nor shall they grieve. [3:169-170]

THE "DAY OF ABUNDANCE"

The best of months is the month of Ramadān, for it was in that blessed month that the Glorious Qur'ān came down. The Night of Power which is better than a thousand months occurs during Ramadān. The fast, which is one of the pillars of the religion, is to be performed as a religious duty during this month. Supererogatory worship during this blessed month receives the reward normally reserved for obligatory acts.

The best of all acts is the prayer that is performed five times daily as one of the pillars of faith. The best of all days is Friday. The venerable Ibn °Abbās died on a Friday … The Lion of Allāh, °Alī ibn Tālib said: “The best deed of all is the one accepted from you by the Lord, be it little or much. As for the best of months, it is the month in which you sincerely repent to the Lord of Glory; as for the best of days, that is the day when you die and leave this world in faith.” Imām °Alī relates that the most noble Messenger said: “On Friday seventy angels sit at the door of every mosque. These venerable angels write down the names of those who enter there. Finally, when the Imām sits in the pulpit, the last man enters and takes his place without jostling anyone. He does not engage in worldly talk. This last man to arrive receives the smallest reward of all those performing the Friday Prayers. Nevertheless, he is forgiven all the sins he has committed since the previous Friday.” If the least reward for anyone performing the Friday Prayer is such a favor as this, try to estimate the great merit attained by those who come early.

Allāh has given this day as a gracious gift to the community. One of the glorious sūras in the Holy Qur’ān was sent down concerning this day. The souls assemble on Friday. It is on that day that one should visit the tombs, since it is a Friday visit that touches the occupant of the grave. This does not apply to the Saints of Allāh, for if they visit a tomb on any day of the week, it touches the occupant.

In the Divine Presence, Friday is called “The Day of Abundance”; that is the name given to it by the angels. On Fridays the people of Paradise witness the beauty of the Lord of Beauty; it is the Feast Day of the believers and the Pilgrimage of the poor. There is a moment on Friday when every prayer is accepted.

The venerable Adam received his soul on Friday. It was on a Friday that the venerable Noah was delivered from the flood. On a Friday the venerable Adam reached Paradise; the venerable Joseph was rescued from prison; the venerable Moses received divine succor; Pharaoh was drowned, and the venerable Jesus was raised to heaven. It was on a Friday that our Master, the Messenger of Messengers, the Beloved of the Almighty, won a victory over the unbelievers of Quraysh at Badr; Islam was saved on a Friday. Among the people of Paradise the name of Friday is the Abode of Peace, for on that day sins are covered over and forgiven. On Friday the torment is lifted from the people of Hell; benedictions recited on Friday reach the most noble Messenger directly; that is, without any intermediary.

On Friday and Monday nights the most noble Messenger is informed of the good and evil deeds of the Community. The Resurrection will start on Friday. If the All-Powerful and Self-Subsisting Lord wishes to punish a people, he deprives them of knowledge about the grace and value of Friday and the Night of Power.

According to Imām al-Ghazāli, our Master, the noble Messenger said that the reward of the martyr is credited to anyone who dies during the day or night of Friday. On the eve of Friday we should do charitable deeds to delight the souls of our departed kin.

The blessed Prophet said: “Good deeds are presented to Allāh on Fridays and Mondays, none being accepted from breakers of family ties, while it is on Fridays that they are presented to the Prophets and to fathers and mothers.”

Every day an angel cries: “Man is born to die; buildings are made to end in ruin!” An intelligent person builds for the Hereafter …

The Blessed Jesus and the Fragrant Tomb

The blessed Jesus chanced one day upon a tomb. This tomb was radiant with light, and beautiful fragrances wafted from it. Praying to the Lord, Jesus asked that the occupant of the tomb be brought to life so that he might talk to him. At that very moment the tomb was split in two and Jesus saw a person sitting at a table of Paradise, eating the bounties of Paradise. Realizing that the blessed fragrance had come from these, he asked the owner of the tomb who he was. “O Spirit of Allāh,” said the man, “I am the one who came to warn you of the plot against your life.” When he was asked what he had done to deserve the bounty he was enjoying, he replied: “I do not owe these blessings to my own good deeds. I have a pious grandchild still living in the lower world. He is always giving alms and charity for the benefit of my soul; these good things you see are the reward for his charity. These bounties, these lights, are my gifts from that devout and pious grandson of mine.”

Said Jesus: “Tell us about the advantages of having children.” “O Spirit of Allāh,” said the man, “You are known in the world through your Prophethood, while we in the tomb can boast of a reputation through the pious children and grandchildren who survive us. On Friday night in particular, Allāh sends angels to bring us dishes of light, containing our children’s alms, supplications and prayers for forgiveness in the form of bounties like these, upon which we feast. Each person in his tomb receives good things to the extent of his children’s charity and almsgiving. Sad indeed are the dead who have no son or grandson, or who do have descendants but receive no blessings from them.”

A Mother Finally Blesses Her Departed Son

This story is related by Zāhid Murghī, the Sheikh of Abū-l Layth al-Samarqandī, may Allāh sanctify their souls:

“I was on my way to a certain city when night fell. In those days, they used to shut the city gates at sunset, at the same time as the call to evening prayer. Unable to enter the city, I lay down to rest in a cemetery on the outskirts. It was the eve of Friday. In my sleep, I dreamt that the dead had emerged from their graves in the cemetery. They came in groups, in companies, and sat in circles. Food and parcels were distributed among them from trays that came down from the sky. The parcels contained clothes. They dressed up in these fine clothes, ate the food and rejoiced.

“In the midst of this happy scene, one young man emerged from a tomb on his own; his clothes were worn, his appearance pale and sad. He was given neither food nor clothing. He kept apart from the gathering. Lonely, with bowed head, he looked forlornly on. I approached him and asked: ‘Why are you standing there all alone? Why don’t you join this gathering and share their food?’ ‘Dear Sheikh,’ he replied, ‘These people all have sons and daughters, or else mothers and fathers, praying for them in the lower world. For the sake of their souls, these relatives of theirs are reciting the Qur’ān, offering supplications and pleas for forgiveness, as well as helping the poor. Allāh transmits these good deeds and kindnesses to their deceased kindred in the form of food and clothing in vessels of light. As for me, I have no one in this city to do charity in my memory. I am the odd one out. I have nobody to do good for the benefit of my soul. I am not from these parts. My original homeland was India. My father died while traveling. My mother and I reached this city, where I died when my appointed hour arrived. They buried me in this graveyard. My mother took a new husband and forgot all about me. She has never had the Qur’ān recited in my memory; never given alms for the sake of my soul. So, naturally, there is no gift to be sent and presented to me.’ Then the young man made a request of me: ‘Dear Sheikh!

When you enter the city, you will find a woman of such and such a description, in a certain house, in a certain street of a certain quarter. That is my mother. Go to her and tell her how things are with me. Perhaps she will take pity on me and do some act of charity for my sake, some good deed in my memory. My situation is very tough. I am hungry and thirsty. I have nothing to wear, and I am very lonely here. Tell her about all this.' "

In the morning, the venerable Sheikh went into the city, sought out the address the dead man had given him and found a woman matching his description of his mother. Explaining the nature of his visit, he asked the woman whether she came from India and if her husband had died on the road. "How did you come to know about all that?" she asked. The Sheikh then continued: "A son of yours died in this district ten years ago. I saw him in a dream. He wanted me to tell you to bless his memory, recite the Qur'ān and have it recited for the sake of his soul, pray and beg forgiveness for him, give alms and rescue your son from hunger, thirst and nakedness." The poor woman's eyes were full. She wept for a long time. Then she went indoors and fetched a hundred thousand aspers[2], saying: "Take these and give alms for the sake of my boy's soul." Said the Sheikh: "I distributed the money among the orphans, widows and needy people of the city. I had the Opening Sūra of the Qur'ān recited for his soul, and I caused the affirmation of Divine Unity to be proclaimed seventy thousand times." The Sheikh continued his tale:

"The following Friday eve, I again went and slept in that cemetery. As before, I saw all the dead arise from their graves in groups and companies. I spotted that brave young man, as the bounties were being bestowed on them in the vessels of light sent down from the sky. Like the rest of the dead, he was wearing new clothes and receiving favors. Now he was happy too. 'Noble Sheikh!' he called to me, may Allāh have mercy upon you. By getting my mother to remember me, and by having alms distributed and prayers recited for my sake, you have filled my tomb with light. You are the cause of my present happiness.' Clad in those fine garments, he joyfully

mingled with the assembled company. They gave him a place in their midst and he sat down with them to eat. When I awoke from my dream with a start, they were just announcing the third hour of night from the minarets. I praised and glorified my Lord on account of the things I had seen."

The Messenger of Allāh has given us the good news that: "If a person visits his parents' tomb each Friday eve [i.e., later than the afternoon prayer], he is reckoned as having done them a kindness."

THE "DAY OF WITNESSING"

You should not omit the Friday prayer even if it takes you a whole week to get to it and return home. Do not prevent your servants and employees from doing the Friday prayer. Do not worry about the business you lose through taking time off to perform it … If you only knew how great is the reward you receive in this prayer, you would not exchange this Divine Remembrance for all the gold in the world.

After performing the Friday prayer, seek the good pleasure of Allāh. Remember Him that you may attain success and salvation. To attain success means to enter Paradise, while attaining salvation means deliverance from the fire of Hell …

Abū-l'Layth relates this saying of the blessed Messenger: "Recite many benedictions for me on Friday, for that is the Day of Witnessing. The angels are witnesses to the benedictions you recite. The benedictions you recite are presented to me directly as long as they continue to be offered."

Our Master went up into the pulpit to deliver the Friday sermon. Turning the blessed beauty of his face towards the congregation, he stood and gave an eloquent address. Just then a caravan from Syria approached the city, beating tambourines to make its presence known while a man came on ahead to announce its arrival. When the people in the mosque learned in this way that the caravan had come, they left off listening to the sermon of the Messenger of Allāh and ran to meet the caravan. Only twelve people stayed behind in the mosque. The Messenger of Allāh said: “I swear by Allāh, who holds my soul in His Almighty hand, that if you twelve had not stayed behind, this valley would have been filled with fire.”

How terrifying are these words of the Messenger of Allāh: “If you miss the Friday prayer three times without good reason, despair of my intercession!”

We also read in the collection of noble Traditions called al-Masābīh. “If anyone misses the Friday prayer without good reason, let him donate a gold coin. If that is beyond his means, then let him give half a gold coin”. If a person misses Friday prayer in congregation three times, his testimony becomes unacceptable. In other words, he loses full human status.

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The venerable Abū Bakr gives us the following good news from our Master:

“Anyone who makes a complete ablution on the Day of Congregation has his sins forgiven. When he walks to the mosque, for every step he takes Allāh records to his credit the worship of twenty years. Then when he performs the Congregational Prayer he receives a reward of a hundred years’ good works.”

The venerable Sa°īd ibn Musayyab said: “ Performing the Friday prayer is even dearer to me than making a supererogatory Pilgrimage.”[3]

FRIDAY PRAYER IS A FORM OF PILGRIMAGE

Says the venerable Maysara: “I was once passing a Muslim cemetery and I gave my salutation as I went by. I offered a supplication for those who lay there. Suddenly, I heard a voice calling from the graveyard: “Good tidings to you who live in the world below! You are making Pilgrimage four times a month.” In amazement I asked: “How can it be that we make Pilgrimage four times a month?” and the voice replied: “These Pilgrimages are your Friday prayers. Don’t you know? Performance of the Friday prayer is a blessed Pilgrimage. Going to the mosque and then back home again is like circumambulating the revered Ka°ba. On Fridays, our souls come right up to the mosque gates. We see your good deeds and hear your remembrance. We are pleased with you for wishing us mercy and blessings.”

FRIDAY PRAYER OBSERVED BY THE ANGELS

Beyond the seventh level of heaven stands the Prosperous House, beside which rises a tall minaret along with a pulpit and prayer niche. When Friday comes, Gabriel gives the Call to Prayer from this minaret while Isrāfīl

climbs the pulpit and delivers a sermon. Michael acts as Imām and leads the congregational prayer. The angels of heaven and earth make up the congregation, just as we fill the mosque to perform our Friday prayers. When the prayer is over, Gabriel makes this supplication: “I donate the reward for the Call to Prayer I recited today to the muezzins who gave the Call to Friday Prayer on earth.” Isrāfīl says: “I present the reward for the sermon I delivered to the credit of the preachers who delivered sermons on earth.” Michael adds: “My Lord, I offer the reward for the Friday prayers I led to the Imāms who lead Friday prayers on earth.” Then the angels who performed the Friday prayer say: “Our Lord, we offer the reward for our Friday prayers to the Community of Muhammad that prayed behind the Imām on earth; please accept.” Allāh announces His good tidings and the manifestation of His All-Mercifulness by saying: “O My Angels, do you not know how great is My generosity for believers who perform the Friday prayer? For the sake of My might and majesty, I have pardoned the existing sins of those of My servants who perform the Friday prayer in obedience to My command and following the guidance of My beloved Muhammad.”

THE SECRET MOMENT OF GRACE

Further good news from Allāh to the Community of Muhammad: Beneath the Throne there is a group of angels whose number only Allāh is aware of. The faces of these angels are as bright as the sun; their heads as radiant as the moon; their breasts shining like the stars. When Friday comes these angels prostrate themselves to Allāh. In their prostration they pray: “O Lord, pardon the believers who perform the Friday prayer today.” Allāh replies: “Bear witness, O My angels, I have pardoned them.”

The Prophet, on him be peace, relates the following: “Gabriel once came to me with a white mirror in his hand. ‘What is this, Gabriel?’ I asked. ‘Your Lord presents Friday to you herewith. He has made Friday a Feast Day for

you and your Community.' There was a dot in the middle of the mirror. 'What is this dot?' I asked, and Gabriel replied: 'There is a moment in the twenty-four hours when prayers are accepted. The dot you see indicates that moment'".

Friday is the Chief of Days. There is a moment on Friday when prayers are not rejected. We are told by the Masters of mystical knowledge that the moment in question occurs during the time when the sermon is being preached. This knowledge proved decisively significant for the Muslim Turks at a turning point in their history. At the great battle of Malazgirt, the gateway to Anatolia, the heroic commander Alp Arslan assembled the scholars and Sheikhs as he addressed his warriors in council. He told them the enemy forces far outnumbered their own, as well as being greatly superior in arms and ammunition. When we sought advice on how to proceed, the assembled scholars, Sheikhs and warriors were told: "Tomorrow is Friday. There is a secret moment on Friday; supplications made at that moment are certain of acceptance. It has been surmised that the moment occurs during the time when the sermon is being delivered. If that moment is chosen for attacking the enemy, no matter how great their strength and numbers, Allāh gives good news that the foe will be routed and victory will belong to the Muslim army." The decision to attack having been made, the council of war dispersed.

Next morning, the whole army was up before dawn to perform the ritual prayer. Then, with the venerable Alp Arslan at their head, all the warriors-for-the-faith took off their armor and their clothes, to wrap themselves in their shrouds. Alp Arslan also wound a shroud around his head, saying: "Flight is a disgrace. The highest Paradise lies in the shadow of the swords. See, I have dressed in my shroud and am ready to meet my Lord. The angels are prepared to welcome us. Above all, Muhammad, on him be peace, is waiting for us with open arms. However long we survive in this world, there we shall go in the end, wearing only our shroud. I am wearing mine from this moment. Let all who wish come with me."

With one voice, the entire army started making the heavens resound with the cry: “Allāhu Akbar!” The time of Friday prayers was close at hand. Alp Arslan produced a copy of the Noble Qur’ān and held it in front of him. He also had with him the blessed key to the revered Ka°ba. He opened the Holy Qur’ān and recited some Verses from the Sūra entitled “Victory.” Now it was time for the sermon and supplication, so Alp Arslan drew his sword from its scabbard and signaled to the Qur’ān-reciters, who began reciting appropriate Sūras at the top of their voices. Then he gave a signal to the warriors, who cried in unison: “Allāh, Allāh” till their voices carried that word of glory right up to the Throne on high.

It was as if the tombs had burst open. Clad in their shrouds, as if ready to give account of themselves on the Day of Reckoning, the soldiers went into the attack with such ardor and solemnity that they scattered at the first onslaught an enemy army of a hundred thousand foot and fifty thousand horse. Just like lions springing upon a pack of jackals… The opposing battle cries mingled, “Allāh, Allāh” from one side and “Hurrah!” from the other. Corpses piled up as high as mountains. One Muslim warrior was obliged to contend with forty of the foe. But despite the odds, the secret of Friday’s most noble moment was revealed; not only was that mighty host put to rout, they could not even save their king from being taken prisoner …

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All business and trading is unlawful from the time when the preacher mounts the pulpit until the obligatory prayer of two cycles has ended with the salutation. You can do business all week, but at this particular time it is unlawful.

Said our Master, the Messenger: “The first person to come for the Friday prayer receives a reward equal to that for sacrificing a camel in Allāh’s cause. The second to come, a reward like that for slaughtering a cow for the sake of Allāh. The third, one like that for slaughtering a sheep. The fourth, like that for giving a chicken as alms. The fifth obtains a reward like that for donating an egg.”

When the preacher ascends the pulpit, the angels who have been standing at the door to record these rewards take up their pens and notebooks and gather round the pulpit to hear the sermon. Worshippers who arrive after this cannot obtain any of those rewards. They merely fulfill their basic religious obligation.

On Friday, a man should perform a special major ablution, i.e. wash from head to toe, and have his wife do likewise. Then, if Allāh grants a child, it will be pious, righteous and generous.

Make an effort to go to distant places for the Friday prayer. We have described the merit earned with every step. Wear clean clothes, but do not restrict your cleanliness to what you wear; take careful pains to purify your heart and conduct also. Do not talk during the sermon; above all, do not drop off to sleep. The Friday sermon is the equivalent of a ritual prayer of two cycles, so talking and sleeping are just as inappropriate then as during the actual prayer.

If you do come late, do not try to push your way to the front, jostling your fellow worshippers of Allāh. Wear a pleasant perfume. If you can take the time from work, come to the mosque early and do not be in a hurry to leave. Give alms to the poor. Be more than usually kind and generous to your wife and family on that day. Let them see you smiling. Be very wary of incurring

sin or other liabilities. While respectful observance of Friday brings very great merit and reward, the punishment for disrespect is correspondingly severe … Beware of missing the Friday prayer without valid reason, or you will be counted among the hypocrites. Our Master the Messenger says in a noble Tradition. “If anyone misses three Fridays because of laziness, Allāh will seal up his heart.” And in another Tradition:

“If someone misses three Congregational Prayers, thinking it unimportant, Allāh sets a seal on his heart. Anyone who misses three Congregations, with no excuse, is recorded among the hypocrites.”

The more noble, important and useful a thing is, the worse its condition when corrupted. To take a simple example: While an egg is highly beneficial if drunk or eaten fresh, it can be poisonous when stale or rotten. On this analogy, the more reverently and respectfully you approach the Friday prayer, the greater your reward will be; but to the extent you approach it with disrespect, that same Friday prayer will be the cause of your perdition.

Form straight rows, standing close together in the line. The straightness of the rows in congregational prayer should be symbolic of an inner straightness and directness. This is the meaning of the Prophet’s words: “Straighten up, so that Allāh may have mercy upon you” [istaqīmū yarhamkumu-llāh]. “Straightening up” refers not only to the rows during prayer, but equally to straightness and purity of heart. Indeed, it refers to straightness—honesty—in all our dealings, without which we cannot deserve the mercy of Allāh.

My Lord, let us obtain Friday’s intercession! Include us among the righteous who worship You on that day and achieve Your mercy! Grant us

our desire on Friday, the day of congregation! Our desire is to please You. Help us to act at all times according to Your noble pleasure! Perhaps our Friday prayer this week will be our last. If we may not live to join another, let us die in faith! …

We have failed to remember You as You deserve to be remembered. Accept us despite this shortcoming. Is it possible to thank You for the endless bounties You have bestowed upon us? Though we are in the midst of Your bounties, as the fish in the ocean are surrounded by water, we are incapable of thanking You for one drop. We are incapable even of counting the blessings You have given us. We should be grateful to You by night and by day, in hardship and in ease.

Our standing in prayer and our prostration are for you. We acknowledge that You are free of all attributes of deficiency. We glorify and sanctify You. You are One. You exist. Your being has no end. Keep us on the straight path! Make us surefooted in the religion of Islam, which is the Straight Path! Include us not among those with whom You are angry and who have incurred Your wrath! Disobedient sinners though we be, we are the Community of Your beloved Muhammad. Let us not despair of Your compassion. We come to Your court. Do not turn us away empty-handed! Do not drive us from Your door. Show us Your aspect of mercy. Do not take from us the bounty of health and the blessing of faith!

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O Compassionate One! O Bountiful One! O Requiter of good and evil! O Glorious One! O Ever-Forgiving and Ever-Kind! Treat us with Your gracious kindness! Make things easy for us in all our good works! Make us free of arrogance, vanity, sanctimonious pride and hypocrisy! Let us see

how insignificant we are … As You have created us human in outer form, make us inwardly human also! Let us rejoice in Your pardon! May the soul of Allāh's Messenger be pleased and content with us!

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description, and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds … For the approval of Allāh, His Messenger and His people.

NOTES

[1]The office of muezzin is a great honor. Said the venerable °Umar, may Allāh be pleased with him: "If I had not been Caliph, I would have been a muezzin."

[2]Small silver coins

[3]The venerable Imām al-Shāfi°ī regards Traditions related by Sa°īd ibn Musayyab as absolutely authoritative.

THE SIXTEENTH DISCOURSE

The True Festival

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Prosperous is he who purifies himself, remembers the Name of his Lord and prays. Yet you prefer the lower life, while the Life Hereafter is better and more lasting. All this is in the ancient pages, the pages of Abraham and Moses. [87:14-19]

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A BANQUET IN BOTH WORLDS

From the annual station of Ramadān, so pleasing to Allāh, we come to the Festival where our train makes a stop at the end of the blessed month. Ahead of us lie many other Ramadān and Festival stations, which we may or may not reach.

Those who keep the fast for the sake of pleasing Allāh gain control of their lower selves. One who knows how to exercise this control comes to realize his own limitations and impotence, and for one who has learned this, Allāh spreads His divine banquet, saying: “My special servants, you have kept the fast at My command, now I invite you to My divine banquet, eat and drink through My grace and generosity.”

They will be told: ‘Eat and drink with relish, in return for what you paid in advance in the days gone by’ [69:24].

The Glorious One tells us that we shall enjoy this banquet, not only during the Festivals in this world, but also when we arrive in Paradise, by passing the obstacles and escaping the painful difficulties of the Place of Resurrection with our faith intact:

“My special servants, at My command you fasted for Me in the world below, for My sake you gave up eating and drinking. Now, please enjoy your food and drink as a reward for these good deeds you performed in those bygone days. Now, enjoy eternal bliss in return for the hardships you suffered because of your good deeds. Now you have become clean and pure. You have been victorious in the struggle with the lower self, which is called the Greater Struggle [al-jihād al-akbar]. To be truly human one must conquer this lower self, subjugate it and control its desires. It is through this that the distinction between man and animal becomes apparent. Today is your Day of Victory.” There is a similarity between our ordinary Feast Days and those of the Hereafter. Dying, being put in the tomb, awaiting the Resurrection and the time of reckoning, then waiting hungry, thirsty and naked to pass from the Reckoning to the Balance, from the Balance to the Bridge, then from the Bridge to Paradise or to the Waters of Kawthar, all this corresponds to Ramadān. Drinking from the Basin of Kawthar, entering Paradise, putting on the garments of Paradise and attaining salvation and success, may all be compared to the Festival at the end of Ramadān.

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THE THREE CLASSES, AND THE SEVEN LEVELS OF THE SELF

The ordinary person is addicted to eating, drinking and sexual intercourse. When he worships, he does so for the sake of Paradise, for in Paradise food, drink and sex are lavishly available.

On jeweled couches, reclining face to face. Immortal youths to wait upon them, with goblets and jugs and a cup from a spring, causing no headache or intoxication. And fruit of their choice, and flesh of fowls as they desire. Lovely dark-eyed maidens, pure as hidden pearls: a reward for what they used to do. There they shall hear no idle, sinful talk, but only the saying: Peace, peace.' Those on the right hand—happy those on the right hand! They will be among lotus trees without thorns, and clustering plantains. In spreading shade and gushing waters. And fruits abundant, neither failing nor forbidden. And couches raised up high. We have created their spouses specially, and made them virgins, amorous and of matching age. [56:15-37]

It is different for the extraordinary few, the élite. In this world, the believers are divided into three groups:

a) the ordinary people;

b) the élite;

c) the élite of the élite.

As for the self, it falls into seven categories:

i) the Domineering Self; [al-nafs al-ammāra]

ii) the Censorious Self; [al-nafs al-lawwāma]

iii) the Inspiring Self; [al-nafs al-mulhima]

iv) the Tranquil Self; [al-nafs al-mutma’inna]

v) the Contented Self; [al-nafs al-rādiya]

vi) the Pleasing Self; [al-nafs al-mardīya]

vii) the Pure Self, [al-nafs al-sāfiya]

The first three categories represent the self of the ordinary people. In other words, an individual is considered ordinary if his struggle with the self takes him as far as the third category. The fourth, fifth and sixth categories belong to the elite, while the seventh is peculiar to the élite of the élite. Having said a little about these distinctions, we shall describe how the fast is observed at each level.

At the level of the Domineering Self, a believer is distinguished from an unbeliever merely by affirmation of the Divine Unity and by conformity with the rules of Sacred Law. Such a person will utter the Profession of Faith; when asked what religion he belongs to, he will say: “I am a Muslim!” He bears a Muslim name. His body will be interred in a Muslim cemetery, and the Islamic funeral prayer will be performed over it.

At the level of the Censorious Self, a person commits all kinds of wickedness as at the first level, but with the difference that he later repents, feeling remorse and censuring himself. He undoes his repentance, then renews it again. This state is a first step toward salvation and becoming a good person.

At the level of the Inspiring Self, a person sins and then repents. He goes on sinning, but also persists in worship. He regrets his actions, laments and prays, then again obeys his lower self. Sometimes he masters it, sometimes he falls under its control. The ordinary people's fasting, which we described above, is the type of fast observed by those at this level.

As for the fast of the elite, this is the fast observed by those individuals who rise from the level of the Tranquil Self to that of the Pleasing Self. It is unlike the fasting of ordinary people. As well as abstaining during Ramadān from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse, the elite abstain at all times also from eyeing unlawful objects, from backbiting, lying, talebearing, cursing and foul speech; they strive to keep their mouths from uttering insults and from eating forbidden food, their eyes from listening to bad talk, their hands and feet from actions and places disliked by Allāh.

The ordinary people celebrate the end of Ramadān by enjoying food, drink and sex during the daytime as well as the night. The elite group also resume these enjoyments after Ramadān, but in the other respects we have mentioned they keep their various organs in a lifelong state of fasting. When they die in faith they celebrate through the divine command: "Return!"

O tranquil soul, return unto the Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing. Enter among My servants, Enter My Paradise. [89:27-29]

Throughout their whole lives, they shield their eyes from unlawful things, adopt a prudent outlook, keep their tongues unsoiled by backbiting and beautify them by remembrance of Allāh.

Having purified their mouths with the affirmation of Divine Unity, the elite group do not dirty them again through lying and backbiting. Speaking truly, they commend truth and patience. They illumine their blessed mouths with remembrance of Allāh, and make them beautiful by reciting the Qur'ān. They eat only lawful food. They stop their ears from listening to things displeasing to Allāh. They hear the word of God, understand what they hear and act upon what they understand. They employ their hands in works of charity and wisdom, use their feet to run to places pleasing to Allāh, spend their precious lives in Allāh's cause. For the elite, the time to celebrate the Festival is when, at the moment of death, they hear the gracious divine command: "Return!"

THE ELITE OF THE ELITE

There is yet a third group, known as the élite of the élite. They are at the level of the Pure Self. These are the servants who enjoy the acceptance and approval of Allāh. These are the successors of the Messenger. As we well know, allegiance to the Messenger is allegiance to Allāh. The world holds these beings in honor. They are beings of great worth, inheritors of the charismatic powers of the Messenger, on him be peace.

Fasting for them means abstinence in Ramadān in accordance with the letter of the Sacred Law, keeping their organs in a lifelong state of fasting at all other times also, and going beyond all this to imbue themselves with attitudes based on the Qur'ān and the example set by Muhammad, concerning themselves inwardly with nothing but the truth.

In the case of ordinary people, the fast is broken by eating, drinking or having sexual intercourse.

The fast of the élite is broken in the same way, but also by the unlawful glance, telling a lie, listening to backbiting, going to bad places, or touching anything displeasing to Allāh.

As for the élite of the élite, their fast is broken if they so much as think of anything but the truth.

Allāh says in His Qur'ān: We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. [50:16]

and:

In other words, these beings are so close to this divine nearness that, while still in this world, they are admitted to the highest Paradise. For them, each day is a Festival and every night is a Night of Power.

The beloved of Allāh has given us the good news that, in the noble month of Ramadān, we become as pure of sin and disobedience as on the day we leave our mother's womb. This good news is for ordinary people and the élite, not for the élite of the élite. The latter are in the ocean of Unity. They give no thought to Paradise, to °Arasāt, to the levels of Paradise or its houries and attendants, nor to the depths of Hell and its varied torments. They are in the Truth, entirely with Allāh, wholly with Him …

For us, Festival time comes twice a year. The religious Feast Days come and go each year. One of them is the Festival that ends the noble month of Ramadān, while the other is the Feast of Sacrifice. These Festivals are for the ordinary people, happy days for children. They are for the child in us.

The real Festival is achieved by those who come to faith, enter Islam, spend the day without sin, and devote their whole lives to God's cause. They give the correct answers to the Interrogating Angels, come under the Banner of the Messenger at the Place of Resurrection, obtain intercession, weigh heavier in the reward scale of the Balance, receive their record in the right hand, cross the Bridge safely, drink the waters of Kawthar from the Messenger's hand, are delivered from Hell, drink from the Basin of Life, give up their lives for the sake of God and His Messenger, don the garments of Paradise and celebrate the Festival by seeing God face to face.

According to Jarīr ibn °Abdillāh, may Allāh be pleased with him: "We were sitting in the presence of the Prophet, Allāh bless him and give him peace, when he looked at the moon—on the night of its fullness—and said: 'You will all be presented to your Lord.'

If celebrating the Festival was simply a matter of putting on new clothes, shaving and visiting the steam bath, the unbelievers could do as much.

Those who behave like this do at least celebrate the Festival of this world. There are some unfortunates who have never even heard of the Festivals.

The true Festival is celebrated by escaping the obstacles and attaining the bounties we have enumerated. Those who celebrate merely by dressing up in new clothes, shaving and having fun, indulging their lower selves without obedience or worship or regard for the approval of Allāh, will be left with nothing more than their worldly festivities. On that dreadful Day, when the believers and faithful lovers enjoy the Feast of eternity, these poor wretches will be in mourning. For them, that Day will be a day of endless frustration, agony and torment.

The right to celebrate the Festival belongs to those who believe in Allāh, His Messengers, the scriptures and the angels, that good and bad alike are from Allāh, and in the Resurrection after death; who obey their Lord and follow His command, accepting it gratefully as a blessing; who keep the fast of Ramadān in hope of reward from Allāh; who perform the tarāwīh prayers, bring happiness to the poor and pay the alms-due. They spend their nights reciting the Qur'ān and in the company of God, while during the hours of day they cultivate angelic qualities, purify their hearts of attributes disliked by God, cleanse themselves and beautify with remembrance of Allāh and affection for His beloved and noble Prophet the abode of divine vision that is the human heart. The Messenger has told us that those who fast like this become as innocent as on the day they left their mother's womb. They celebrate the true Festival …

The Saint and the Blind Beggar

A Saint once encountered a blind beggar in the streets of Baghdad. The beggar told him that he had not been blind from birth, but had lost his sight

later in life.

The blind beggar explained how this affliction had come to befall him: “I used to be a robber of shrouds. At that time I had the use of my eyes, naturally. I became quite an expert at opening graves and stripping the dead. Well, in this city there was a just magistrate. He sent for me one day and the following conversation ensued:

“ ‘I have heard how you occupy yourself,’ said the magistrate, ‘but I cannot have you convicted and punished because you have not been caught in the act. Give up this evil practice and repent to Allāh!’ Then he added, before we parted company: ‘Let me give you the price of my shroud here and now. If I should die before you, don’t leave me naked in the tomb! Should you be the first to go, I shall waive my claim to this payment.’ “ ‘I give my word,’ said I, ‘to you and to Allāh, that I shall not rob your tomb.’ He gave me an extra tip, over and above the price of his shroud, and I went away promising not to touch him.

“Some time later, as all mortals must, this judge drank the wine of death and passed on to the eternal world. But habits die hard! For a while, I kept myself in check. In the end, however, my lower nature got the upper hand. ‘What of it?’ I told myself. ‘I’m going to rob him. The man is dead and the shroud is rotting there for nothing. Here’s a chance to make a double profit.’ As soon as night fell, I made my way to the cemetery. I found the judge’s grave and dug it up. But when I got inside to take the shroud, I found myself in a different world. I just squatted there, lost in bewilderment.

“Two imposing angels appeared in the grave. I was trembling with fright and amazement, unable to breathe. I looked on in fear at what was about to happen. My jaw was locked tight. The angels circled the dead man,

examining his organs. ‘Good for you, magistrate, good for you!’ they said, congratulating him. ‘What a holy person he must have been,’ they exclaimed in praise of the judge. Suddenly, one of the inspecting angels noticed a sore on the man’s left ear. As they were asking each other what could have caused this discharge of pus, a third angel appeared, saying: ‘The sore in his ear is the result of his having handled a case unfairly.’ Then he explained: ‘This magistrate was just; he used to judge fairly. But one day two litigants came before him with their dispute. One of them happened to be an acquaintance of the magistrate, who gave more serious attention to his case. He did recognize that his friend was in the wrong, and gave judgment against him, nevertheless he was guilty of wrongful unfairness for having heard him too favorably with his left ear.’ The other two angels then asked what should be done with him. ‘Fill his tomb with fire,’ said the third. As they poured in this fire, the heat was so intense that it blinded my eyes.”

ONLY THE JUST HAVE THE RIGHT TO CELEBRATE

It is the just who earn the right to celebrate the Festival. Our Master, the true informant, has told us that he who judges justly for one hour is dearer to Allāh than one who performs supererogatory acts of worship for sixty years. That is why the Qur’ān tells us that success is achieved and the Festival celebrated by those who do not incline to wrongfulness. They are delivered from the Fire and enter Paradise.

Bahlūl Weeps for the Caliph

The saint known as Bahlūl the Wise Fool was a conscious spiritual guide. Some say this most holy individual was the brother of Harūn al-Rashīd, the °Abbāsid Caliph. This noble person used to disguise his store of wisdom behind a pretense of craziness, just as clever people hide their buried

treasure among ruins. His apparent insanity veiled the fact that he was a Universal Intellect. He came and went undisturbed in the palace of Harūn, who would ask him all kinds of questions, seeking his guidance on affairs of state, while he protected the Caliph's afterlife.

One day, he came into the palace to find the Caliph's throne unoccupied, so he promptly sat down on it. This was a gross impertinence. To sit on the Sultan's throne was an outright act of lèse-majesté. The penalty was very serious, perhaps even death. Seeing Bahlūl sit on the throne, the soldiers struck him so violently that his cries of pain brought Harūn al-Rashīd running to the scene of tumult. Bahlūl was sobbing loudly. When Harūn asked the reason for the uproar, the soldiers told him: "Sire, Bahlūl committed an impertinence. He sat on your throne, so we chastised him with a beating." As he turned to console Bahlūl, the Caliph said to the soldiers: "For shame! The poor wretch is crazy. Would any sane man sit on the imperial throne?" Hearing his kind words: "Don't cry! Don't worry. Wipe the tears from your eyes," Bahlūl the Wise Fool said: "O Caliph, it is not their blows that make me weep; it is for your sake I am lamenting." "For my sake?" exclaimed Harūn in astonishment. "Why should you weep over me?" To this, Bahlūl replied: "O Caliph! I sat on your throne once, and what a beating I got for sitting there for just a few moments. But you, you have occupied this throne for twenty years. What kind of a thrashing will you be in for, I wonder? It is that thought that has me weeping." Harūn al-Rashīd was dismayed. Now it was his turn to weep. He groaned and tore at his beard and hair. "What can I do," he asked, "in order to escape that beating, that torment in the Hereafter?" "Be just," came Bahlūl's reply. "Administer your kingdom with justice. Govern justly that you may be spared your thrashing in the Hereafter."

The just achieve salvation, while wrongful tyrants enter the Fire. The Festival is celebrated by the just, by those who keep away from wrongfulness. It is celebrated by those who keep their tongues from backbiting; they achieve success and Paradise. Backbiting is a vile habit,

hated by Allāh, who says: “Believers, would you like to eat your dead brother’s flesh? To slander your brother, believer, is to do exactly that, for he is not present to defend himself. Of course, you would hate to eat your dead brother’s flesh, so fear Allāh and avoid backbiting; give up this habit and repent. Allāh is the Accepter of repentance, the Compassionate One.”

In Sūrat al-Hujurāt, the Exalted One declares backbiting unlawful. His Messenger has described it as more ugly and evil than fornication and adultery, which all the revealed religions regard as filthy. Those who give up backbiting have achieved success and salvation; by forsaking this evil habit they have surely earned the right to celebrate the Festival.

Saint Bāyazīd Has a Frightening Dream

Saint Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī said: “I once attended a funeral. Among the others present was a fine-looking, devout and ascetic person, who started to hold out a beggar’s bowl. This did not seem at all proper to me. This person should not be begging, I told myself.

“That same night I had a dream. That person was brought to me, dead, and I was forced to eat his flesh. ‘Does one eat human flesh?’ said I. ‘This I cannot do!’ Then they told me: ‘You did eat his flesh today.’ In fact, I had neither spoken critically to the man, nor told anyone else about his unseemly begging. I had simply thought to myself that such behavior ill befitted such a handsome, radiant-looking person.”

Merely to think a thought like that is reckoned a sin on the part of Allāh’s saints. The rest of us are guilty if we voice our thoughts and perpetrate

backbiting. The virtues of the pious are faults in the holy.

The Venerable °Ā'isha Spits Out Flesh

The venerable °Ā'isha, Mother of the Believers, relates: "I was in the presence of the Messenger when a woman came, asked him some questions, then got up and left. 'O Messenger of Allāh,' said I, 'how tall that woman is!' Our Master said to me: 'Spit out what you have in your mouth.' I spat and out came a piece of flesh. As I looked at it in amazement, he said: 'Do you know what that is?' 'No,' I replied. 'Allāh and His Messenger must know.' He then explained: You ate the flesh of that woman who came here just now. This is a piece of that woman's flesh.' 'O Messenger of Allāh,' I cried, 'what I said was a fact!' Said he: 'To state a fact is backbiting, while to state an untruth is calumny and slander.' "

Calumny, that is slander, is more serious and more wicked than backbiting. The Glorious One tells us in Sūrat al-Nūr of the Holy Qur'ān that His curse awaits those who are guilty of calumny and slander, especially those whose conduct is designed to impugn the honor of people of good repute:

As for those who slander virtuous women, indiscreet but believing, cursed are they in this world and in the Hereafter. Theirs will be an awful torment. On the day when their tongues, their hands and their feet bear witness against them as to what they used to do; on that day Allāh will pay them their just deserts, and they will know that Allāh is the Manifest Truth. [24:23-25]

The venerable °Ā’isha and Safwān are innocent of the aspersions falsely cast upon them. Because of the suffering those lying accusations caused them, they enjoy forgiveness and generous provision in Paradise.

The noble and glorious Messenger is good. It is because the venerable °Ā’isha is also good that she is a wife worthy of the Messenger of Allāh, entitled to be called the Mother of the Believers. A painful punishment in both this world and the Hereafter awaits anyone who slanders a virtuous lady from the Community of Muhammad. One can therefore imagine the torment to be faced by those who calumniate the venerable °Ā’isha, the dearly beloved wife of the Glory of the Universe and the Mother of the Believers.

Guarding our tongues from backbiting and slander, we find success and celebrate the Festival. That celebration is enjoyed by those who empty their hearts of all that is other than Allāh, who purify themselves inwardly and outwardly, whose hearts are sound and enhanced by fear of Allāh and by love of Allāh and His Messenger. For the lover is resurrected together with the one he loves. You die and are resurrected along with the object of your preoccupation.

Where is my Donkey. . ?

A man once died and was buried. Many years later, one of the Apostles of Jesus came to invite that man’s people to religion. They wanted him to perform a miracle, so he asked them what kind of miracle they wanted. “Bring a dead man back to life,” said they.

They chanced upon the grave of the man we mentioned. The Apostle prayed to Allāh, then said: “Arise! Come back to life by Allāh’s leave.” The tomb burst open and the dead man came out alive. “Where is my donkey, where is my donkey?” was all he had to say to the Apostle, on him be peace. For during his life he had been preoccupied with his donkey. Whatever you are preoccupied with, you will die accordingly, and as you die, so shall you be resurrected. You will be together with whomever you love.

Said the Prophet, on him be blessings and peace: “A man is with the one he loves.”

TRUE HAPPINESS

True happiness is found by those who remember Allāh. We often remember those we love. Those who remember are also remembered. A human being in this world has three main postures: standing, sitting and lying down. Remember Allāh when you are standing, that He may remember you on the day when all mankind must stand. The violence of that day will bring the Prophets to their knees, crying: “Myself, myself!” Remember Allāh when you are sitting also, that He may remember you. And remember Allāh when you are lying down, that He may remember you when they lay you on your side in the tomb, leaving you all alone with your deeds. Do not forget Allāh. Be aware of Him always and remember Him constantly. The Glorious One says:

So remember Me and I shall remember you. [2:153]

And:

If you are thankful, I will surely give you more and more. [14:7]

And:

If you help Allāh, He will help you. [47:7]

Remembrance is not just a matter of reciting the Divine Names. Remembrance means not forgetting Allāh in anything one does. It is knowing Allāh sees you, even if you do not see Him.

As for gratitude, this is not sufficiently rendered by saying: “Thanks, O Lord.” Gratitude of the body is expressed by performing acts of worship, while material gratitude is shown by paying the alms-due, giving charity and interest-free loans, and helping the destitute and the starving, as well as by being economical and avoiding extravagant waste. Gratitude for beauty is shown by preserving one’s virtue and honor. All these are practical expressions of thankfulness to Allāh. The Festival is celebrated by those who remember Allāh and are grateful for His bounty …

The Festival is celebrated in this world and in the Hereafter by those who aid Allāh’s religion. In this world they escape disgrace and rise in dignity, while in the Hereafter they enter Paradise.

The Festival is also celebrated by those who patiently endure misfortunes, who disregard selfish desires and persevere in worship.

Now let us come to the good news given to believers who fast in the noble month of Ramadān, cultivating the qualities Allāh loves: For every act of worship, a grade of Paradise is awarded. But as for the divine recompense to be given to lovers who observe the fast, Allāh has kept it a secret from us.

According to Ibn Mas°ūd, the Messenger of Messengers said: “When the Feast Day comes, and believers who have fasted go out to perform the Festival prayer, Allāh, Lord of Beauty, says to His angels: ‘O My angels! My servants who have obeyed my command now wish for their rewards from Me for the worship they have performed. Bear witness that of My grace and generosity I have granted rewards to these servants of Mine according to the grading of their good deeds. Some I have recompensed with My forgiveness, some with My Paradise and some with My beauty.’ Hearing this divine kindness toward the Community of Muhammad, the angels give us the good tidings: ‘Congratulations to you, O Community of Muhammad! Go home rejoicing. Your sin has been pardoned. Your wicked deeds have been transformed into good ones.’ The Lord of Beauty and Generosity, says: ‘My special servants, you have fasted to please Me. By My grace you have broken fast. Return to your homes. I have pardoned you. I have made you worthy of My Paradise.

Of course, just as one who knows is not the same as one who does not know, he who keeps Allāh’s command is not the same as he who does not keep it. This divine favor mentioned by the Almighty is for those who serve the Lord.

The beginning of Ramadān is mercy, the middle is forgiveness and the end of it is deliverance from the Fire …

THE END OF IGNORANCE

The Festival at the end of Ramadān should mark the end of our ignorance. From that time on, we should increase our obedience, not our disobedience to Allāh. We put on the clean clothes of a fresh devotion. We crown our heads with the diadem of pardon and forgiveness. We have been saved from Hell, delivered from the Fire. We must not defile ourselves again with the sewage of this world. This is the warning we receive from the king of Prophets:

"When the feast day arrives, Satan gives a shout and gathers his armies about him. They ask why they have been summoned together and he tells them, in anger, grief and dismay: 'Don't you see? Allāh has pardoned the Community of Muhammad. Go, spread out over the earth! Lead them astray by distracting them with lust, liquor and other things disliked by Allāh. Stop them from praying, keep them from remembrance of Allāh and get them back into their wicked ways and dirty habits, so that they may incur the divine wrath and become fit for the Fire.'"

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Our Master, the Messenger says: "Enhance the days of Festival with good works. Beautify them with charity, supplications, pleas for forgiveness, reconciliation and the recitation of the Qur'ān. Avoid all that is evil. Be in piety and righteousness. Occupy yourselves with glorification of Allāh and

affirmation of His Oneness. For on that day He has cleansed you of your sins. He accepts your supplications and looks mercifully upon you."

Why a Saint was Unhappy on the Feast Day

A saint of Allāh, called Sālih ibn °Abdullāh, returned home very sad from the Feast Day prayers one year. He wept and wept and wept. To those who asked the reason for his grief, he explained: "My Lord has commanded me to fast, to pray and to give the alms-due. All these I have done, but did I do so to my Lord's satisfaction? Has He approved and accepted this worship and service of mine?" Then he went on weeping.

"Do not be unhappy, " they said. "Today is a Festival, a day of rejoicing." But he replied: "My Feast Day is not today; it is the day when my Lord is pleased with me." When people asked him why he always sat in the corner of the mosque, he told them: "This is the place where supplicants and beggars sit, and I am my Lord's supplicant and beggar."

THE DAY OF THE FEAST AND THE DAY OF RESURRECTION

One should not be overconfident about the fast he has kept, the prayers he has performed or the alms he has given. Was your fast or your prayer truly worthy of your Lord? Were they acceptable in the divine sight? Think about alms in particular. Ask yourself whose money you are giving to whom. A rich person is Allāh's steward, while the poor are like His dependents. Do you understand whose money you have given to whom? Let us not feel proud of ourselves for giving alms. Allāh could one day dismiss you from His stewardship.

When the Feast Day arrives, the Generous Creator commands his angels to descend to the globe of Earth. Alighting in the Muslim lands, the angels give those glad tidings to the Community of Muhammad: “O Community of Muhammad! Come to the mosque, which is the house of Allāh, to receive your rewards from the All-Generous One!”

When the believers have reached the mosques, performed their Festival prayers and then opened their palms in supplication to the Unique Source, the Glorious Lord addresses these words to His angels: ‘O my angels, bear witness that I have accepted the fasts of those believers who fasted to please Me. I am pleased with them and I have forgiven those who kept the fast.” By informing us of this, our beloved Prophet has immersed us in joy. Those who receive such tidings may well celebrate the Festival.

The days of Festival resemble the Day of Resurrection. Of course, the similarity is apparent only to people of insight … On Festival days, we see crowds of people going about, some on foot, others riding horses, bicycles, cars and wagons. Some are crippled and drag themselves along, while some are blind and can hardly find their way around. Some are wearing fine clothes, but others are naked, barefoot or in rags. The pedestrians resemble those who walk from the grave to the Place of Resurrection, while those with transport remind us of the righteous rising from the tomb, as mentioned by Allāh in the Qur’ān:

Then we shall gather the righteous before the All-Merciful, a mounted company. [19:85]

In other words, those who fear and love Allāh, who are meticulous in their obedience to His command, will be provided with mounts on which to come to the Place of Resurrection.

The people dragging themselves along remind us of the state of the unbelievers, who will rise from their tombs at the Resurrection and drag themselves along the ground like serpents. The blind, groping their way with difficulty are like the sinners who shun the Qur'ān. For if a person turns away from the Qur'ān, the divine remembrance, the Holy Qur'ān itself tells us that he will be resurrected blind:

But whoever turns away from My remembrance, his will be a narrow life, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him blind. He will say: 'My Lord, why have you raised me blind, when I used to have sight?' Allāh will say: 'So it is. Our signs came to you, and you forgot them; and so today you are forgotten.' [20:124,125,126]

Those who are wearing fine clothes are symbolic of the doers of good works, who will be clad in the garments of Paradise and will enjoy its food and wine. Those who are naked represent the rich of this world, who were too mean to do a fellow Muslim a good turn, or who were observant of prayers, fasting and almsgiving, yet violated the honor and reputation of others, struck someone or put someone to shame. When accounts have been settled, they are left bankrupt and stark naked.

Those who go around hungry on the Feast Day symbolize those who will be hungry and thirsty at the Resurrection, because in this world they neither fasted nor fed the starving. Those who are laughing happily resemble the people whose record is handed to them from the right at the Resurrection, while those who are sad and weeping resemble those who will receive their

book from the left and from far behind. Naturally, all these reminders are there only for those with eyes to see.

Whoever understands the mystery of “Die before you die,” Has seen the Resurrection here, before the trumpet sounds.

Prepare yourself for that Day! Make provisions for it! If you leave it too late, your tears will be of no avail.

ALMSGIVING AT THE END OF RAMADĀN

For some, especially for the poor, the Feast Days are an unhappy time. How can the Festival be enjoyed by people in prison, in hospitals or away from home? It may well be a source of great distress to them. During these festive days we should visit those who are confined in prison or hospitals. We have a duty to cheer up lonely old people and strangers far from home. Above all, we ought to win the approval of Allāh by being kind to people who have fallen on hard times, paupers, orphans, widows, the elderly who are sick, scholars, the righteous and the devout. Orphans must be clothed and the hungry fed.

Do not put all your trust in your money and your life! … You may die soon, leaving your own children orphans …

It is our absolute duty to give the fast-breaking alms before the Festival prayers. According to the Hanafī doctrine, this donation is incumbent only to those who possess a certain measure of wealth; but for goodness’ sake do

not quibble over making this small contribution! Just as the “prostration of absentmindedness” makes up for deficiencies in the prayer, the fast-breaking alms compensate for shortcomings in one’s fast. Give fast-breaking alms to the poor before your Festival prayer, on behalf of your children also. A great reward is obtained by giving such alms before the Festival prayers.

It once happened that the venerable °Uthmān waited till after the Festival prayers before giving his Ramadān alms to the poor. When he mentioned this to the Messenger, on him be peace, our Master said: “°Uthmān, even if you were to free a slave in addition to giving alms at this late hour, you could not obtain the reward you would have received for giving alms before the Festival prayers.”

It is like this with all acts of worship in Ramadān. Five pennies given in alms before the Festival are considered, in honor of Ramadān, the equivalent of five dollars. Five pennies after the Festival are counted as fifty pennies and so recorded in the book of deeds. During Ramadān the ratio is a hundred to one, while after Ramadān it is ten to one. If Allāh wills, He records wages and rewards many times over.

PROPER OBSERVANCE OF THE FESTIVAL

The following duties are incumbent on Muslims at the Festival: To take a complete bath, either in a public steam bath or at home. To wear new or clean clothes. To wear pleasant perfumes when going to the mosque. To say “Allāhu Akbar” on entering the mosque. In the case of the Ramadān Festival, to eat something sweet when going to the mosque.[1] When leaving the house with the intention of per forming the Festival prayer, one must exclaim “Allāhu Akbar” in a loud voice.[2] If possible, one should return

home by a different route. For Tradition tells us that places, earth and stones will testify on our behalf on the Day of Resurrection. On the first day of the Festival, we should wait till afternoon before paying calls, while visiting should begin in the morning on the second and third days. We should be considerate of our hosts in timing our visits … Quarrels must be reconciled. If our parents have died, we must make a point of calling on those they loved, out of respect for their memory and to please their souls. Whatever happens, we are obliged to visit our teachers and close relatives; if they are too far away, good Islamic custom requires that we send them letters or greeting cards. We must also visit the tombs of our dead, remembering them as if they were still alive; sitting by their graves, we should recite a little from the Qur'ān and reflect on our own destiny, which will soon bring us to the same end, to be left all alone with our deeds. We should not pluck the grasses that grow on their graves, for their remembrance of Allāh is of benefit to those who lie within.

It is not permissible for a woman to go the cemetery unaccompanied, though a group of women may visit the tombs together. It is our duty to give alms for the sake of the souls of our dead, delighting their souls by offering them the reward obtained by so pleasing Allāh. If these acts of charity are done on Festival days or on Fridays, the resulting reward is beyond description. If a person goes to visit his parents' grave on the Ramadān Festival, he is credited with a good deed for every step he takes.

If one or both parents should be living, Allāh grants Paradise to children who kiss their hands and foreheads, treat them with kindness and generosity and make them happy. But if a child should fail to discharge these obligations toward his parents, Allāh will deprive him of this divine bounty and will cast him into His Fire.

If someone cooks a special meal for a beggar on the day of the Festival, Allāh will reward that person's kindness with the bounties of Paradise, including the present of a heavenly palace adorned with rubies and pearls.

Any believer who continues to observe the Islamic standards of behavior to which he conformed during Ramadān, will become as innocent as on the day he was born … But to the servant who sins on the day of Festival, the Glorious Lord will say: "O My disobedient servant, I admitted you into My mercy, but you wish to enter the Fire. I do not want to dismiss you from My service and separate you from My servants. Repent from this disobedience of yours. Return to Me, that I may pardon you and forgive your sins."

For any servant of His who increases his wife's allowance in honor of the Festival, Allāh will open the gates of plenty and shut the gates of poverty and need, making him happy in this world and in the Hereafter.

Bahlūl Disrupts the Caliph's Festival Parade.

One Feast Day, the °Abbasid Caliph Harūn al-Rāshīd donned his splendid imperial robes, mounted his horse and rode into the street. The soldiers cleared the Sultan's path, while the people gave him an ovation, gazing admiringly at his beautifully embroidered robes. At that moment, Bahlūl the Wise Fool barred the Sultan's progress, reciting some stanzas containing guidance for Harūn and, through him, for us. The gist of them was as follows:

The Festival is not a matter of dressing up in fine new clothes.

The Festival is celebrated by serving Allāh and being aware of your Lord.

To celebrate the Festival is to be Sultan of the heart, not Sultan of the realm.

Sultans of the realm pass into oblivion, but the Sultan of the heart is never forgotten.

To celebrate the Festival is to be delivered from divine punishment at the Resurrection.

The Festival is not a matter of wearing perfumes, but of being sorry for one’s sins, repenting and not committing them again.

The Festival is not about riding on horseback, but about giving up faults.

The Festival is not about sitting on the imperial throne, but about crossing the dreadful Bridge, to sit on the thrones of Paradise.

The Festival is celebrated not by boasting of palaces and power, but by bringing light to the darkness of the tomb and equipping it through good works.

This brought Harūn al-Rāshīd to tears.

To rejoice and show a smiling face on the day of Festival is one of the tokens of Islam. Says Abū Bakr:

“One Feast day, I entered the room of my daughter °Ā’isha to find two servant girls clapping their hands and beating tambourines, as they chanted verses about the heroes of Islam. They were chanting odes in praise of these heroes and reciting stanzas describing their bravery and courage. They had a book in which these were written. The Messenger, on him be blessings and peace, was present also, stretched out on a sofa with his robes wrapped about him and his face covered. When I came in, I tried to stop the women playing the tambourine and reciting the odes, but our Master got up from the sofa, uncovered his blessed face and said to me: ‘Abū Bakr, do not interfere with them. Let them play the tambourine and enjoy themselves. Today is the Festival. It is a day of joy and happiness. To express our happiness on our Festival is one of the tokens of Islam.’ ”[3]

Our Master informs us that Allāh will bestow the following ten favors on those who give the fast-breaking alms:

“The fast-breaking alms cleanse the body of sin. He who gives those alms is delivered from the Fire; his fast is accepted and his work is blessed. By divine grace, Paradise is conferred on those who give the fast-breaking alms; they will arise from the tomb in safety. Giving these alms ensures acceptance of one’s good works. At the Resurrection, he who gives them will obtain my intercession, cross the Bridge like lightning and weigh heavier in the good scale of the Balance. If that servant’s name has been recorded in the register of the wicked, it will be erased and entered in the list of the blessed.”

If, in addition to fasting throughout Ramadān, a person also fasts for the six extra days after the Festival, that makes a total of thirty-six days. Since Allāh counts each good deed as ten, the reward earned will be equal to that for a fast of three hundred and sixty days. There are five Feast Days a year, four at the Festival of Sacrifice and one at the Festival of Ramadān. If we deduct these from three hundred and sixty five, the person concerned will have effectively fasted for a whole year.[4] It is unlawful to fast on the first day of the Ramadān Festival and throughout the four days of the feast of Sacrifice. Fasting during these five days is no less sinful than failing to observe the fast during Ramadān.

An intelligent person will add these extra six days of fasting to his Ramadān fast, thereby qualifying as having fasted for the entire year, and earning the approval of his Lord.

My Lord, protect us from the guile of Satan, the affliction of devils in human guise, the evil of our own selves and the enemy who laughs in our faces! Make us Your special servants! Do not dismiss us from Your service or drive us from Your door! Do not make us evildoers! Let our end and outcome be good! Let our last words be the affirmation of Divine Unity and the Glorious Qur’ān!

In honor of the Chief of the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds.

NOTES

[1]In the case of the Festival of Sacrifice, however, the recommended custom is not to eat anything till after the prayers, then to break fast on sacrificial meat.

[2]This is not customary in Turkey, however, where “Allāhu Akbar” is pronounced inaudibly.

[3]This story is told in the books of Tradition called Sharh al-Mishkāt and Tāj.

[4]Based on a Tradition related by Abū Hurayra and recorded in the Sahīh of Muslim.

THE SEVENTEENTH DISCOURSE

The Spirit of the Holy Qur'ān

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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EVERYTHING IS CONTAINED IN THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

The Holy Qur'ān explains what is lawful and unlawful, good and bad, pleasing to Allāh or incurring His wrath. It sets forth the divine limits and sublime rules. It leads mankind to Allāh's guidance and approval, showing the way to Paradise. It distinguishes truth from falsehood. Such a light and so firm an anchor is this Book, that everything can be found within it:

Not a thing, fresh or withered, but it is inscribed in a Clear Book. [6:59]

ALL SCRIPTURES REVEALED IN RAMADĀN

It was in the month of Ramadan that this Book of Allāh began to come down to the noble Messenger upon Mount Hirā. Like the Qur'ān, all the other scriptures were sent down in the blessed month of Ramadān, the time of forgiveness; the Torah that was given to Moses, on him be peace; the noble Gospel, as it is revealed to the venerable Jesus, the spirit of Allāh; the Psalms that came to the venerable David; the scrolls that were sent to the venerable Abraham, and the tablets sent down to the other Prophets, on them be peace.

It is apparent that Allāh communicates with His servants by messenger. This is something that cannot be denied. All the heavenly scriptures transmitted by means of these Messengers or ambassadors came down during Ramadān. The beginning of this close contact between Allāh and His servants has always occurred in the blessed month of Ramadān. Indeed, "Ramadān" is one of Allāh's names. Relations between God and creatures occur in Ramadān. There is no doubt that the final Book of Scriptures is the Glorious Qur'ān or that the final Messenger is Muhammad, on him be peace.

THE QUR'ĀN IS NOT TO BLAME FOR MUSLIM WEAKNESS

If the Muslim nations have become backward, the fault lies neither in the Qur'ān nor in Islam, but in the Muslims themselves ... They show superficial respect for the Qur'ān while displaying a total disregard for its spirit. In many places, indeed, there is no longer reverence even for the pages of the Book, let alone observance of its spirit. In these circumstances how can we Muslims expect Allāh to help us? In Sūra Tāhā, the Glorious Lord says:

> But whoever turns away from My remembrance, his will be a narrow life, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him blind. [20:124]

From this we should understand that our backwardness lies not in the Holy Qur'ān, not in the religion of Islam, but in us Muslims ourselves.

It is only because we are the Community of Muhammad, that Allāh does not wipe us completely from the face of the earth as He has done with other

communities. He chastises some of us under the fist of a tyrant, some of us under foreign domination and some of us through our own children. Nevertheless, the Lord of Majesty promises that if we repent and re-embrace the spirit of the Qur'ān, we shall rise again and come back to the human level.

You shall gain the upper hand if you are believers. [3:139]

History tells us how God has exalted those who truly believed. Consider how the Ottoman Turks, originally a very small tribe, became, through their respect for the Holy Qur'ān, an example of humanity to all nations for many centuries.

The First of the Ottomans Reveres the Holy Qur'ān

Osman[1] Bey belonged to the Kayı branch of the Turks of Khurāsān. When Suleymān Shāh was drowned in the Tigris, his tribe had split into two groups, one of which went back to Khurāsān, its original homeland, while the other moved into Anatolia under the leadership of Ertughrul Bey. They arrived in Anatolia to find two armies locked in battle and, as befitted Muslim Turks, they rushed to the aid of the underdogs.

The side they had helped was none other than that of the Seljuq Turks, who rewarded Ertughrul Bey for his decisive support by granting him the right to settle his people near Eskishehir, in the district bordering the Byzantine territory. It was in this district that he had the good fortune to meet Sheikh Edebali, who was spreading the Light of Muhammad in the area. This Sheikh Edebali, sanctified be his soul, was a being with the character of

heir-to-the-word-of-Muhammad and heir-to-the-state-of-Muhammad. He possessed both exoteric and esoteric knowledge and was a cupbearer of Divine Love. Ertughrul and his son Osman shared the Turkish disposition to be particularly loving, affectionate and respectful toward scholars and sheikhs. Since the practical scholars and noble saints are the inheritors of the Prophets, love, respect and obedience toward them are like love, respect and obedience toward the Messenger. And to have these feelings for the Messenger is like having them for Allāh. As He tells us:

Whoever obeys the Messenger, obeys Allāh. [4:80]

Osman Bey would often visit the venerable Sheikh Edebali, take his advice and spend time in his company. The two were very fond of each other. It was a matching of body and spirit; Osman Bey represented the former and Sheikh Edebali the latter. One night, Osman Bey stayed in the home of the venerable Sheikh. They sat up late, enjoying a most agreeable conversation. Then they took Osman Bey up to the guest room prepared for him. A clean mattress was spread on the floor. A dervish showed him to his room, then came away saying: “Allāh give you a comfortable rest!” Osman Bey had undressed for bed, when he noticed a copy of the Holy Qur’ān inside a pouch hanging on the wall. He could not bring himself to lie down opposite the Qur’ān, so he stood there respectfully till morning came. To lie down would have been permissible in sacred law, but not everyone takes advantage of all dispensations.

The call to morning prayer was given, and the holy Sheikh led them in offering that prayer to Allāh. Then they resumed their conversation. Meanwhile, the dervish who had gone to put away the bedding noticed that it had not been slept in. He reported this observation to the venerable Sheikh, who asked Osman Bey why he had not used the bed. “Oh dear,” cried Osman Bey, “please do not get the wrong idea. The bedding was

perfectly clean. But the word of Allāh was hanging on the wall and I could not lie down facing it." Hearing this, the venerable Sheikh kissed Osman Bey on the forehead. He then gave instructions for the Holy Qur'ān to be removed with reverance, so that Osman Bey might lie down and get some rest.

Osman Bey did stretch out on the bed to catch a little sleep. He had a dream, in which a tree grew out of his breast, spreading its branches over East and West. When he awoke he told his dream to the venerable Sheikh, who said: "Osman, my son! I have a proposal to make. If you marry my daughter, I shall interpret your dream."

"Why, master!" cried Osman, "What a great privilege for me. I accept, of course!" Said the venerable Sheikh: "My son! Allāh will give you and your descendants such a great kingdom that you and your children will be emperors. You will be given dominion over East and West." And so it proved to be ...

THE FIRST REVELATIONS TO THE BLESSED PROPHET

How did our Master first receive the divine revelation? The following details are taken from the collection of noble Traditions made by al-Bukhārī. The Glorious Qur'ān came down on the Night of Power in the month of Ramadān from the Preserved Tablet to the first level of Heaven, the House of Majesty. From there it was brought down to our Prophet by Gabriel, on him be peace, bit by bit in the course of twenty three years. Our Master tells us: "I had become fond of solitude and used to worship My Lord on Mount Hirā. An angel came to me there and said: "Read!" I said: "I cannot read." Then he took hold of me and squeezed me, saying: "Read!" Again, I said: "I cannot read." And again he took hold of me and squeezed

me; he repeated the same command: “Read!” and once again I said: “I cannot read.” For a third time, he took hold of me and squeezed me very tightly to his breast, saying: “Read!”[2] Then he recited five Verses from the Sūra that begins with the word iqra’.[3] That is how he began to bring me the revelation.[4]”

Now, let me ask those who unfairly state that Islam has made us backward: How can our backwardness be caused by a religion that first began with the command “Read”?

Is the Qur’ān to blame if we have failed to read? It says to us: “Read”, but we do not do what it tells us ...

STUDY AND PRACTICE

Sulaymān al-Darānī says: “When the Day of Resurrection comes, the first to be seized by the guardians of Hell and thrown into the fire will be those who worship idols and attribute partners to Allāh, along with those who read the Qur’ān but disobey Allāh.” Our Master, the Messenger says: “To read the Qur’ān without practicing what one reads is the same as not reading the Qur’ān at all.”

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The Lucid Qur’ān beckons us to the light. In essence, the Qur’ān is light. The Qur’ān calls us to justice. The Qur’ān forbids us to wrong ourselves and others. The Qur’ān calls us to worship our Creator. The Qur’ān calls us

to help one another. The Qur’ān calls us to humanity, loyalty and self-sacrifice. The Qur’ān calls us to success and salvation in both worlds. Can we blame the Qur’ān and Islam if we remain in error, paying no heed to these Qur’ānic invitations? In the days when we did heed the Noble Qur’ān, studying and understanding what we heard and then acting on our understanding purely for the sake of Allāh, although our numbers were few, we triumphed over many. Though we were lowly, we became mighty. Our justice won the admiration of all the world. History records our many conquests.

MERIT OF QUR’ĀN-RECITATION

Imām Alī described in these words the merit of reciting the Qur’ān: “If a believer recites the Qur’ān while standing in prayer, he receives one hundred rewards for every letter he recites. If he sits while performing the prayer, he receives fifty rewards for every letter. If he recites the Qur’ān at other times other than in the prayer, in a state of ritual purity, he receives twenty-five rewards for every letter. If he recites the Qur’ān from memory while not in a state of ritual purity, he receives ten rewards for every letter.”

The Glorious Lord tells us in the Holy Qur’ān that during Ramadān He will increase the ratio from ten to one to seventy or a hundred to one, or even more:

Allāh grants increase manifold to whom He wills; Allāh is All-Embracing, All-Knowing [2:261]

DIVINE GUIDANCE NEEDED IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE QUR'ĀN In Sūrat al-Isrā', Allāh tells us:

And We send down of the Qur'ān that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers, but to the unjust it brings but added ruin. [17:82]

A person can therefore read or write as much as he will, but without divine help and guidance he will never comprehend the Qur'ān. He may listen, but he will not hear. He may look, but he will never see. Allāh said to His noble beloved:

You see them looking at you, but they do not see. [7:198]

If the eye of the heart is blind, though we look with our ordinary eye, we cannot see. If the ear of the heart is deaf, though we listen with our ordinary ear, we cannot understand. Umm al-Maktūm was blind in the ordinary sense, yet she saw and believed in our Master and Most Illustrious Messenger, for she saw with the eye of the heart. Abū Jahl and his friends, on the other hand, being inwardly blind although they could see with their physical eyes, were unable to believe. Those among them who were blessed with divine assistance, whose inner eyes were enlightened, did eventually come to faith; they saw by God's inextinguishable light. One of them was °Umar ibn al-Khattāb.

The Light of Faith Comes to the Venerable °Umar

°Umar was valiant and brave, a powerful warrior who was at the same time a scholar. He was one of the prominent citizens of Mecca, who traveled and traded in Egypt, Syria and Iran. This is how the venerable °Umar came to have faith: He was a man who enjoyed respect and high rank in the Mecca of his day, but he did not believe in the venerable Prophet. He was angry at heart toward the Messenger, whose opposition to idolatry and false gods had split the Arab nation into two camps. But although °Umar was intensely annoyed, he did not feel able to make an open display of hostility. He was not mean and aggressive like Abū Jahl. He often heard the Verses of the Qur'ān revealed to our Prophet, but he would turn away, understanding nothing for want of divine assistance.

He could make no sense of what the venerable Muhammad was reciting; it certainly was not poetry. Then one day, Abū Jahl made this announcement: "I promise a hundred red camels to anyone who kills this Muhammad, who is sowing discord among our people, denying our gods, making our slaves our equals and gathering the poor people around him." The town criers went about proclaiming this promise of Abū Jahl's.

A host of armed men gathered at the Ka°ba, ready to volunteer for the task. °Umar happened to be there too. The significance of Mecca was not what it is today; a different atmosphere prevailed there then. The eyes of the accursed Abū Jahl scanned the cruel men who had assembled in response to his offer. His aim was to incite °Umar to do the deed. But he knew that °Umar would not rush headlong into undertaking this act of aggression. He would do so only under pressure from his peers, for when he saw the act as a fait accompli, his misguided zeal would compel him to save face.

Since °Umar belonged to a populous tribe, they need not fear a blood feud with the Banī Hāshim; even if feuding did break out, the resulting weakness of both tribes would only enable the Banī Umayya to gain control over the

whole nation. This was a potent stratagem, but no one had stopped to think whether Allāh approved of the plan. And yet Allāh is the best of planners.

Creatures may think up schemes, but they fail to consider whether or not God will support their plans. So it was that Abū Jahl glanced at the people assembled there and then addressed them, saying: “Yes, you are all brave heroes, but if anyone can do this deed it is none but °Umar ibn al-Khattāb.” With these words, he laid the task upon °Umar standing there. °Umar could not have refused. Had he done so, what would have become of his honor, pride and dignity? At a stroke, he would have ceased to count for anything among the Quraysh.

All those present voiced their approval. “Yes,” they cried, “°Umar will do the job. We trust him.” °Umar went off and quickly prepared his weapons. He was now determined to do the deed. They told him where our Master was staying and he set off in that direction, full of fury.

On the way, he encountered someone who asked where he was going. °Umar replied: “I am going to kill this Muhammad, who is causing discord among our people and denying our gods.” The following conversation then ensued between the pair:

“That is a very difficult task.” “Why?” “Let me just say this: you would seem to have made a bad decision.” Don’t tell me you have become a Muslim!” “What I have become is none of your business. But your sister has become a Muslim. Her husband has also become a believer. Take it up with them.”

“You are lying.” “No, I do not tell a lie.” “How can I find out if they have indeed turned Muslim?” “Go to their house. Slaughter a beast and have it cooked. Then invite them to eat with you. They will not join you in eating the animal you have slaughtered; that will show you.”

“I shall kill you if you are lying,” threatened °Umar, turning aside toward the home of his sister. One of our Prophet’s companions happened to be there at the time, teaching the Qur’ān to °Umar’s sister and her husband. Seeing °Umar coming, they hid that reverend being in a cupboard.

When °Umar arrived, he proceeded without a word of greeting to slaughter a beast. He told them to cook it. When they had cooked the sheep, they set it out to be eaten. °Umar invited the couple to the table, but they said: “You eat, we are full.” °Umar insisted, but they still refused to touch the food. °Umar then kicked the table over and unsheathed his sword. Knocking his brother-in-law to the floor, he cried: ‘I understand! You must have become Muslims. After I have killed you, I shall go and kill Muhammad.”

His sister rushed at him, saying: “Yes, we are Muslims now, whatever may happen. We have no fear of death. We have been promised Paradise, while the Fire is your abode.” What had come over this woman? She was springing at °Umar like a tigress, yelling at him at the same time: “Are you not ashamed to take it upon yourself to kill Muhammad, the Messenger of God? What has he done to you? Are you going to kill him for being the defender of the oppressed, the friend of the poor? For denying your idols, al-Lāt, al-°Uzzā and Manāt, which are powerless to harm or help? For calling to Allāh, Lord of heaven and earth? Or are you hostile toward him for trying to deliver you from polytheism and tyranny; for inviting you to Paradise and humanity? You should be ashamed of yourself, °Umar: She tussled with him as she spoke these words. Faith had made her a fortress of steel.

°Umar struck her hard and knocked her to the ground beside her husband. Then he brandished his sword, while that lover of the Messenger began reciting the good sentence: lā ilāha illā-llāh, and some Verses she had memorized from Sūra Tāhā. It was the desire of every Muslim to die with the affirmation of Divine Unity and words of the Qur'ān on his or her lips.

A change came over °Umar when his sister started reciting Sūra Tāhā. His strength ebbed away and his hand lost its grip. His sword fell to the floor. Yes indeed, the hard, irate °Umar had turned soft; something had come over him. His eyes were moist with tears and he was confused about what to do next. The woman went on reciting, expecting the sharp sword to descend upon her neck.

°Umar stepped back and straightened himself up. "What were you reciting?" he asked. "Sūra Tāhā," his sister replied, "from the Qur'ān which has been revealed to the venerable Muhammad." °Umar was enraptured. "Recite a bit more," he said. °Umar became a different °Umar as his sister recited the Verses meaning: "All things in heaven and earth are His." These words were not the speech of a human being. Even if all mankind, the jinn and even the angels got together to work on it, they would never be able to produce anything resembling the shortest Sūra of the Qur'ān.

°Umar's wickedness had been transformed into bliss; °Umar had melted when faced with the words of the Qur'ān. He had been annihilated. The dead °Umar, who was going to kill the venerable Muhammad, had now been revived and brought to life, through the Book brought by the very man he had intended to slay. For the Glorious One describes the unbelievers as dead when He mentions them in His Noble Qur'ān:

To warn whoever is alive, and that the charge be proved against the unbelievers. [36:70]

Now °Umar was weeping, weeping because he had been so slow to come to faith. He was the fortieth to embrace Islam; °Umar now completed the first forty. Could he actually have come to faith on his own? Only the day before, Allāh's beloved, sorely tried by the unbelievers, had raised his blessed hands in supplication to the Unique Source, saying: "My Lord! Reinforce the religion of Islam with either °Umar or Abū Jahl! Make one of them friendly to me!" It was this prayer of Allāh's beloved that had resulted in °Umar's being rightly guided.

BEWARE OF CURSING PEOPLE!

My brothers and sisters in the way of Truth! You should also make prayer and supplication for the sake of those who have not experienced the joys of faith. Perhaps you will be the cause of someone's finding right guidance. Do not pronounce maledictions, do not deprive the sinful and disobedient Community of Muhammad of your supplications! Through the blessings of your prayers, the sinners may one day become repentant, the disobedient obedient.

It is Allāh who converts the heart. How many wicked people have come to felicity through supplications on their behalf?

A person once complained about his son to °Abdullāh al-Mubārak. "Have you never cursed the boy?" he asked. "Yes, °Abdullāh, I did curse him," said the man. "Then it is you who have made him bad," °Abdullāh told him.

Prayers keep heaven and earth in place. When the unbelievers broke his blessed tooth at the battle of Uhud, the Messenger of Allāh prayed for them, saying:

“O God, guide my people, for they do not know.”

Through this supplication, many of those who had drawn their swords against our Master were honored with faith. Because he prayed so mercifully for his people, the Chosen Messenger was granted the Praiseworthy Station. At the coming Resurrection, the Supreme Intercession will be conferred on our Master.

Because Noah cursed the people, he will be incapable of intercession at the Resurrection. When Allāh drowned those who did not believe in Noah, it was inevitable that there should still be unbelievers in this world, therefore the son of his loins became an infidel and disbelieved in him. His curse thus resulted in some of his own descendants being unbelievers.

By a strange coincidence, the son of the villain who martyred our Prophet’s blessed tooth at the battle of Uhud was to fall in battle along with Imām Husayn in the tragedy of Karbalā’. Sa°d ibn al-Waqqās was honored at Uhud with the call: “Shoot, shoot, O Sa°d! My mother and father be your ransom!” His son, °Umar ibn Sa°d, was ambitious to be governor of Tabaristān and cruelly wronged the Messenger’s dearly beloved Husayn and his family. Glory be to Allāh, °Umar ibn Sa°d went to the Fire of Hell without having achieved his ambition.

Why The Prophet Noah Lost His Power Of Intercession

Some of the People of Reality have given this explanation of why Noah has been deprived of the Supreme Intercession: The people of the Prophet Noah had long been called by him to faith, but they had not believed; they would even bring their own sons to the venerable Noah, warning them sternly: “Do not believe in this man!” His own people had set themselves in enmity against him. Only some seventy or eighty were believers.

One day, an old man brought a young fellow up to Noah and said: “My son, beware of being deceived by this man! Do not accept his religion!” Having received this warning, the youth took his grandfather’s staff from his hand and used it to strike Noah a hard blow on the head. He then turned to his grandfather and said: Are you pleased with me now?” The old man replied: “Now you have proved yourself a worthy grandson of mine.” Meanwhile, the blood from the venerable Noah’s head was dripping from his blessed beard.

He prayed to Allāh: “O Lord! Give me knowledge of the Unseen. Will this people ever believe in me?” Came the reply: “No, they will never believe, O Noah.” He then said: “Very well, my Lord! So they will not believe in me. But will any of those who will issue from the waters of their loins believe in me?” Again the reply: “No, they will not believe!” Thereupon, the venerable Prophet uttered this curse: “Let these unbelievers perish! Let not one single unbeliever remain in this world.” His plea was answered by the command: “Now give up calling them. Build an ark!”

Noah immediately set about constructing an ark in order to fulfill this divine command. But would the unbelievers cease their aggression? “What has happened to you, Noah?” they said, “Have you left your mission and taken up carpentry?” They abused him and threw stones at him. Then they

conspired together, saying: “Come, let us defile the ark that Noah is building.” They came and showed their disgraceful contempt for Noah’s ark by making it filthy. The venerable Noah tried to stop them, only to be beaten back. They split his blessed head many times. Weakness overcame his blessed body from the bruising to his liver, and Allāh inspired him to eat large quantities of grapes.

The Lord punished these unbelievers severely by afflicting them with scabies. But they did not realize what had caused this affliction. Observe that when a person suffers an affliction, the real affliction is his ignorance of its source.

The itching got worse. But, not realizing what was causing it, they continued their bad habits. They went on defiling the ark the venerable Noah was making, using it as a toilet. The more they did this, the more intense their itching became, till it kept them from sleeping by night or by day.

One day, as one of these unbelievers was defecating on the ark, his foot slipped and he rolled in the filth. His itching stopped in all the places to which the dirt had stuck. Seeing that the dirt was good for the itch, he rubbed it on the other scabs. As soon as filth was applied, the itching ceased. Finding himself cured completely by rubbing dirt all over his body, the unbeliever ran to tell his people about it. They all came to the ark, cured themselves by rubbing the excrement all over their bodies, and left the ark spotlessly clean. They found a remedy for their scabies by wiping all the planks with their bodies.

Thus we discover the hidden meaning of the Qur’ānic Verse: “The bad for the bad.”

Bad women for bad men, and bad men for bad women; good women for good men, and good men for good women. These are innocent of what they say; theirs is forgiveness and generous provision. [24:26]

At last the ark was ready. Moved by inspiration, one pair of every species of animal came and settled on board. Through inspiration also, the Glorious Lord told the venerable Noah: “Embark as soon as water rises from the underground oven.” And indeed, the day came when the underground oven was full of water. When Noah, on him be peace, saw this, he went aboard the ark along with those who believed in him. At that moment the sky turned dark; heaven was black as ink. A torrential downpour began. It was as if the sky had burst open.

Catching sight of Canaan, one of his own sons who did not believe in him, the venerable Noah was overcome with fatherly compassion. “Come aboard the ark, Canaan,” he called, but Canaan refused, saying: “I can take care of myself. I shall go up into the hills.” The Lord said: “Noah! What are you doing? Why do you want to rescue an unbeliever?” Noah replied: “O Lord, he is my son, my own kin,” but Allāh said: “He is no kin of yours, but an impious unbeliever.”

This divine revelation proves that kinship is not a matter of flesh and blood, but a shared faith. It is said that the reason why the venerable Noah has been deprived of the Supreme Intercession on the Day of Resurrection is that he called his infidel son “my own kin.”

We must not forget to mention here that the last creature to board the ark was the donkey. Satan was holding the donkey by the tail; when Noah saw

that the animal could not move, he cried: “Come on, O cursed one.” At this, Satan came aboard the ark together with the donkey. Some time later, Noah saw Satan in the ark. “O cursed one!” he said, “What business have you here? By what right have you come aboard the ark? Satan replied, ‘Noah! You gave the order. I obeyed.” Said Noah. “How odd! I did not give you permission.” But Satan said: “Did you not say to the donkey: ‘Come on, O accursed one!’? Well, the accursed one is me. That was my permit.” This goes to show how carefully a man must watch his words.

The noble Abū Bakr, the Veracious, used to keep a pebble in his blessed mouth. He would roll it around in his noble mouth to make sure that he always considered his words; he would give an answer only if what he was going to say would be acceptable in the sight of God, otherwise he would keep silent.

Origin Of The Name “Noah”

The book Stories Of The Prophets gives this account of the conversation that took place in the ark between Satan and Noah, on him be peace: Satan asked the venerable Noah: “Why has this trial befallen mankind?” and the venerable Noah replied: “Because they did not believe in Allāh and in me, His Messenger.” The devil said: “That is true, Noah.” Then he added: “But the root of the matter is not only that. If I had not envied Adam, I would not have been driven out of the Almighty presence, away from the sublime mercy; I would not be leading these sons of Adam astray. The real cause is envy and arrogance.”

Noah is not the proper name of the venerable Prophet, but a nickname. The literal meaning of “Noah” is “wailing,” meaning someone who loudly laments. Noah once noticed a sore and mangy dog. When he turned his face

away from it in disgust, the dog said (or somehow conveyed the meaning): “Why have you turned from me in disgust? Is it the craftsman or his handicraft you dislike?” From that day on, he was always weeping and wailing and hardly ever smiled. For the “craftsman” meant Allāh, while “his handicraft” meant His work. To dislike the handicraft was to dislike what Allāh had created, while disliking the craftsman meant disliking Allāh.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MONTH IN WHICH THE QURĀN WAS SENT DOWN

Yes, the rain came down in ocean torrents. The gushing waters covered the whole earth, mountains as well as plains. All the unbelievers drowned in these waters and were destroyed. They paid the penalty for their lack of faith.

All who despise Allāh and His Messenger will one day perish, just like the people of Noah. Their destruction is certain, though to some it will come by water, to some by fire and to some by wind.

Such is the end of those who disobey Allāh. This we know from all the Heavenly Scriptures, including the Holy Qur’ān, which is preserved from alteration, young and fresh in every age, ever triumphant over its foes through fourteen hundred years, victorious in every argument. If you follow it, you will reach Allāh.

The Qur’ān is a secure life-line, one end of it in the hand of Allāh, the other in this world. Whoever takes hold of it, will reach His presence. Those who

let go of it, plunge into the blazing Fire. They are losers in both this world and the Next.

It was in the month of Ramadān that this light, this criterion, this mighty Book began to be revealed; that this firm life-line between Allāh and his servant began to appear. It was in Ramadān that divine communication and relations took place between Creator and creature.

How blessed a month, in which Allāh, Master of heaven and earth, Sole Owner of this universe, our Lord who possesses all worlds known and unknown, began to address us and remind us of our true worth in His divine sight. Do not belittle your own worth! The Almighty tells you: “O son of Adam, I created the whole universe for you. And you I created for Myself.” This world and the Next have been created for you. These seas, continents, suns, moons, stars, all the many bounties of this world have been created for you. Paradise with its houries, palaces, pavilions and attendants, all have been created for you. Do you not see that the rain falls so that you may live? That the fruits appear, and the flowers in all their varied colors? For you the sun gives its warmth. Springs well up that you may live. For your sake the dead earth is revived, restored to life. For you the fruits become tasty.

Just as the dead earth is revived, you will also be brought back to life someday after you have died. Your value is very great; Allāh gives you your soul. An angel as splendid as °Azrā’īl comes to take that soul away at death. In the Noble Qur’ān, that supreme bounty sent down to you by way of the Messenger, you are addressed with the words: “O you who believe!”[5] Be conscious of your honor! These words are addressed to you not by a preacher or reciter, but by Allāh, by Allāh in person, by the Lord of earth and Master of heaven! And it was in this month of Ramadān that He began to address you.

How blessed is this month of Ramadān, when we enjoy divine mercy, forgiveness and generous grace! Ibn °Abbās relates the Tradition: “If my Community realized what divine grace there is for them in Ramadān, they would beg their Lord to let the month of Ramadān fill the whole year. For all good works are rewarded many times over during this month. Worship is accepted, supplication is granted and past sins are forgiven. In Ramadān, Paradise falls in love with my Community.”

The great Sūfi, Dāwud al-Tā’ī, tells us: “On the first night of Ramadān I experienced a state of ecstasy, in which I saw Paradise as in a dream. On the banks of the rivers of Paradise, houries were seated on thrones wrought with rubies and pearls. Their faces were radiant as the sun. Seeing them, I cried: ‘There is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh,’ and they echoed my words in reply. ‘Whose houries are you?’ I asked, and they said: ‘We are the houries of those who believe in Allāh, who observe the fast for Allāh’s sake in the noble month of Ramadān, and who bow and prostrate themselves before Allāh.’”

Our blessed Master said: “Paradise craves four groups from my Community:

i) Those who recite the Noble Qur’ān;

ii) Those who guard their tongues against foul speech;

iii) Those who feed the hungry;

iv) Those who keep the fast in Ramadān."

Such are the characteristics of the People in Paradise. They recite the Qur'ān, do good works and keep their tongues clean. They guard against lying, calumny, backbiting, blasphemy and abuse. Those who keep the fast become aware of the condition of those who go hungry; this awareness prompts them to feed them. The fast is an attribute of All-Mercifulness. It is an attribute of the angels. In other words, one who keeps the fast becomes like an angel, obedient to Allāh, innocent of sin; he acquires light from God's All-Mercifulness and becomes tender and compassionate toward His creatures.

Such a month is Ramadān, that those who respected it, fasting by day and worshipping their Lord and reciting the Qur'ān by night, will become as if born anew. This we are told in the noble Tradition.

You who neglect to observe the month of Ramadān, do not forget that this Ramadān may be your last! Many of your friends, who were still alive last Ramadān, are now mingled with the earth. Perhaps by next Ramadān we shall have left all we own behind us, to lie alone with our deeds in the grave. Seize the opportunity now. Serve Allāh and you will soon discover your reward.

When the month of Ramadān arrives, the Divine Throne, the Sublime Seat and all the angels proclaim the good tidings to the Community of Muhammad: "Good news, O Community of Muhammad! Congratulations to you!" By night and day, all the angels seek forgiveness for us. Sense this good fortune and make it known.

Without question, it is worth welcoming the noble month of Ramadān. The twenty-eight letters of the [Arabic] alphabet are not enough to describe to the Community of Muhammad all the favors in store in Ramadān. Maybe twenty-eight million letters would be needed.

Says the Prophet, on him be peace: “The fire of Hell is forbidden to touch the body of one who rejoices at the coming of Ramadān.” In another noble Tradition, he says: “On the first night of Ramadān, the Lord of Majesty gives the call: ‘Is there no one to love Us, that We may love him? Is there no one who wants Us, that We may seek him? Is there no one seeking Our forgiveness, that We may pardon him in honor of Ramadān?”

Allāh gives this sublime command to the Recording Angels: “In honor of My noble Ramadān, record the good deeds of My servants, but do not write down their bad deeds. I have pardoned their past sins!”

According to °Umar ibn al-Khattāb, the blessed Messenger said: “As a believer who fasts and prays lies turning from side to side in bed, an angel makes this supplication: ‘May Allāh have mercy on you; may Allāh bless you.’ When the believer gets up to pray, his bed says: “My Lord, grant this believer the lofty couches of Paradise! The clothes he wears pray: ‘My Lord allow this believer to don the garments of Paradise.’ As he puts on his shoes, they say: ‘O Lord, make this person sure of foot upon the straight path. Let his feet not slip on the Bridge, which is finer than a hair and sharper than a sword.’ When he takes the jug to make his ablution, the jug cries: ‘O Lord, grant this believer the jugs of Paradise.’ When he washes himself, the water of ablution begs: ‘O Lord, pardon the sins and errors of this person.’ When he stands up to pray, his house makes supplication for him, saying: ‘My Lord, make this believer’s tomb a spacious place and fill

it with light. Bestow Your Mercy on him in abundance.’“Allāh looks on this servant with compassion. When the servant offers supplication, He addresses him saying: ‘O My servant, from you, supplication; from Me, acceptance. From you the question, from Me the response. From you the request, from Me the pardon and forgiveness.’ ”

RAMADĀN TO ASSUME BODILY FORM AT THE RESURRECTION

On the Day of Resurrection, Allāh will embody the month of Ramadān in a beautiful form and take it into His presence. Everything meaningful has a body. Do not forget, be it word or deed, whatever assumes meaning will find embodiment and ascent at the Resurrection into the presence of Allāh. The month of Ramadān will assume a beautiful shape, enter the Almighty presence and prostrate itself. When the Lord God says: “Come, state your need!” it will say: “O Lord, let me intercede for those who respect me; grant me this right of intercession!” Then this command will issue from the Lord of all worlds: “Be an intercessor for those who respect you, observe you and know what you deserve.” Ramadān will go around °Arasāt, bringing those who respect it into the Almighty presence. “See, Lord!” it will say, “These are the ones who gave me my due. They held me in high esteem. Crown their heads with dignity.” Those who have respected Ramadān will be crowned to mark their rank and will be allowed to intercede for seventy thousand sinners. They will be given houries of Paradise and servants will be assigned to them. Then the heavenly steed called Burāq will be brought, and as one of these blessed beings is mounted upon it, Ramadān will say: “O Lord, my request is this: that You lodge this being next to Your beloved in the Garden of Paradise.” When noble Ramadān is asked: “Have you any other request, O Ramadān?” it will say: “My Lord, what greater favor would You grant this blessed being?” Then Allāh, Glorious is His Majesty, will present that blessed being with a palace of red ruby and green chrysolite, next to the Chosen Prophet in the highest Paradise.

See what bounty will be given to those who respect Ramadān.

Allāh describes the houries, palaces and pavilions of Paradise in His Qur’ān:

Dark-eyed maidens, sheltered in pavilions. [55:72]

According to Ibn °Abbās, the Prophet said: “On the first day of Ramadān, a breeze blows from beneath the divine Throne. The rustling of the leaves of Paradise produces a musical sound more harmonious than anyone ever heard.” We know of these melodious sounds only from our Master the Messenger, on him be blessings and peace, who heard them made by the leaves of Paradise during his Ascension.

He tells us that the houries pray, on hearing these modes: “O Lord, make us the mates of Your servants who earn Your pleasure by fasting in this blessed month!”

Such are the bounties of Paradise conferred upon those who obtain divine approval by fasting in Ramadān. These houries wear layers of clothing, the material of which resembles earthly silk. Thrones have been prepared, made of red ruby and wrought with pearls. Every couch has been heaped with pillows of Paradise. Seventy kinds of food are set upon the tables. These dishes are not hard for humans to digest, unlike the food of this world. Each has its own unique flavor and color. Such are the bounties given to those who fast in this blessed month to please their Lord, and who perform other good works.

What is necessary for believers is not to spend their lives wantonly, but to devote them to Allāh's cause entirely. We must show respect for the month of Ramadān through worship and obedience. We must avoid bad things, enlivening these blessed days with fasting, prayers, glorifications and recitation of the Qur'ān. We must deserve this recompense from our Lord. We must illumine the nights of Ramadān with tarāwīh prayers and recital of the Qur'ān.

The Glorious Lord mentioned to the venerable Moses some of the bounties He had granted the Community of Muhammad: "Moses, I have given the Community of Muhammad two lights, so that two darknesses may not harm them." The venerable Converser of Allāh then asked: "What are these lights You have given to the Community of Muhammad, O my Lord?" Allāh, Glorified is He, replied: "One is the light of Ramadān, the other the light of the Qur'ān." "My Lord," asked the venerable Moses: "What are the two darknesses?" and the Glorified One answered: "One is the darkness of the tomb, while the second is the darkness of the Day of Resurrection." The tomb of one who recites the Qur'ān is illumined with the light of the Qur'ān, so that he does not see the darkness of the grave. The light of Ramadān will not leave a person in darkness at the Place of Resurrection.

Recite the Qur'ān, therefore, so that you will not be left in the darkness of the tomb. Let the Qur'ān be your light in that darkness. Respect Ramadān, that you may not see the darkness of the Place of Resurrection ...

My Lord, preserve us from the torment and darkness of the tomb! Preserve us from confusion on the Day when what we used to see is no more, and what we used not to see is brought to light!

Anas ibn Mālik reports from the blessed Messenger, that if a person attends a learned assembly in the month of Ramadān, for every step he takes he will be credited with the reward of one year's worship. "That servant will be with me beneath the Throne on high," says the Prophet, on him be peace. " If a person constantly prays in congregation during this blessed month, Allāh will give him a city of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection for each cycle of prayer he has performed. That city will be filled with the bounties of Allāh."

The bounties to be given will be such as no mortal eye has seen, no ear heard tell of, no human heart enjoyed or known the taste of. If a person is kind to his parents in Ramadān, Allāh looks with compassion upon him. God, Glorious is He, says: 'I guarantee to lodge him in My Paradise."

If a wife earns her husband's approval in Ramadān, that believing lady receives the reward of Mary and Āsiya. If anyone attends to the need of his believing brother during Ramadān, they say Allāh will satisfy seven needs of that person at the Resurrection.

According to Abū Hurayra, our Master said: "If anyone takes a lamp to illuminate one of Allāh's mosques during Ramadān, Allāh will illuminate his tomb. He will be given a reward equal to that acquired by all the believers who pray in that mosque, for as long as his lamp burns. The angels will bless him and the Bearers of the Throne will seek forgiveness for him."

This applies to candles, lamps, electric bulbs and other kinds of lighting. The same goes for all donations to the noble mosques, be it matting, rugs or carpets. Those who cannot read the Qur'ān must be taught and must learn. Memorizers of the Qur'ān should be maintained to recite in the mosques,

which must be enlightened by teachers and preachers who will instruct the Community of Muhammad in religion, faith, ablution and prayer, and who will bring people to Allāh. All these things attract the same reward. As for the reward that will be given to those who serve knowledge of the Qur'ān, this is known to no one but Allāh.

Again, according to Abū Hurayra, our Master said: "On the first day of Ramadān, Satan and the infidel jinn are clapped in irons. The gates of Hell are shut. (No doubt a special gift to Muslims.) Allāh does not reopen that door of Hell, but for the believer who observes the fast, the door of Paradise is opened, not to be closed again for the believer. Each night of Ramadān, the call sounds thrice: 'Has no one a wish, that I may grant it? Does no one repent, that I may accept his repentance? Does no one seek forgiveness, that I may grant him pardon?' Every day of Ramadān, a million people deserving torment are delivered from the Fire. This continues till the first Friday. When the first Friday comes, a million people deserving torment are pardoned every hour. On the last day of Ramadān, a further million people obtain divine pardon for every single individual pardoned up to that time."

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Believer in Allāh, who have given your heart to Muhammad, on him be peace! Seize this opportunity! The divine treasury has been opened; take advantage of it. Obtain the approval of Allāh. Run to all good works, while you still have the chance before the bird of the soul flies from the cage of the body. Feed the starving, clothe the naked, give water to the thirsty and bring joy to the orphan, that Allāh may be pleased with you! When it is time for prayer, do the prayer correctly! If you are rich, give the full alms-due! Make Pilgrimage once in your life! Fast for a month during Ramadān. For these are the pillars of faith and of Islam. Those who neglect them are doomed to frustration and remorse.

My God, You brought us from non-being into being. We were a drop of liquid and You clad us in the dignity of human form. We were naked and You clothed us. We were hungry and You gave us food. We were ignorant and You gave us knowledge. You adorned us with faith. Do not return us from dignity to abasement, from satiety to hunger, from being clothed to nakedness, from knowledge to ignorance, from faith to unbelief and error!

To You be all praise and glory. Blessings and peace be upon Your beloved, his family, his household, his companions, his helpers and his friends. Grant us the intercession of Ramadān! Make us secure from wickedness. Convert our immorality into the morality of the Qur'ān and of Muhammad. Let us all attain the favor of the Messenger's regard. Make us not slaves to our lower nature. Transform our grief into joy, our sadness into gladness. Bless our native land ... Have mercy on our dead. Grant that with our last breath we utter the profession of faith. Make our souls intimate with the soul of Muhammad. Gladden us with Your pardon in both worlds.

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds ...

NOTES

[1]Son of Ertughrul and the eponymous founder of the Ottoman dynasty, called Osmanli in Turkish.

[2]iqra'in Arabic, meaning read or recite.

[3]Sūra 96 of the Qur’ān, usually entitled al-°alaq.

[4]For a full account, see Chapter “The Beginning of Revelation” in Volume 1 of the Sahih of Al-Bukhāri.

[5]yā ayyuhā-lladhīna āmanū

THE EIGHTEENTH DISCOURSE

“Die Before You Die”

Bismi’llāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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See how We prefer some of them over others; surely the Hereafter will be greater in degrees and greater in preferment. [17:21]

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FAITH AND GOOD WORKS: DEGREES OF ATTAINMENT

He who believes, acts upon his belief and spreads it. One who loves, carries out his loved one's wishes. Suppose a person has faith and, through receiving divine assistance, dies in faith without having done good works; this person will be saved from the Fire and will reach Paradise. He will nevertheless fail to attain the high degrees. He may be compared to one who is a citizen of a country, but who does not possess his own house or apartment there ... Faith admits one to Paradise, but those without good works to their name cannot own its pavilions and palaces. Our analogy cannot be pursued too far, since the pavilions and degrees of Paradise are given only to those who deserve them, whereas here on earth it is possible to acquire houses and land illegally.

Arriving in Paradise, the person who has faith but no good works will see the pavilions, palaces and houries there. But none of these will be given to him. He will only get a passing glimpse. For the title deeds to these stations and degrees are represented by good works. They must be acquired in this world, for this world is the field of the Hereafter. Whatever you send on there, you will find it waiting for you on arrival. For every good deed you do, there is a reward of no less than ten, sometimes up to seven hundred and even a thousand. If He wills, Allāh can give much more. One sin is recorded as a single sin. But if Allāh wills, He can record many more.

Those who forward nothing from this world will be bankrupt in the Hereafter ...

So it is with Hell also. Those without faith deserve the Fire. A person who increases his disbelief, who multiplies his wickedness, deserves the deeper pits of Hell. If the same punishment were meted out to one who stole an egg and to another who stole a million, where would the divine justice be? It would be equally at variance with divine justice if the same degrees could be achieved by a person with faith but no good works, and another with both. However, if Allāh wills, He is Able to send his servant to the depths of Hell or to the highest station of Paradise. He is Sovereign in His kingdom, Almighty in His command.

This is not to say that the person with faith but no good works will rise to the highest level. Nevertheless, if Allāh wills, He can confer this degree gratis. In fact, Paradise is not the recompense for good works. It is the recompense for faith, accorded by divine grace. As for Hell, it is the recompense for disbelief and lack of faith, not for sin. Committal to it is by divine justice.

As for one who has faith, if he does not obtain divine grace, if he is attached to his sin rather than to sublime mercy, then in accordance with divine justice he will burn as much as Allāh wills before being delivered from the Fire. Allāh commits no injustice. There is no admission to Paradise without faith. Paradise is for those who have faith in Allāh and the Messenger.

If a person has no faith, yet performs good works, he may be blessed with faith at his last breath in honor of those good works. By the same token, those who have faith, but perform no good works and wrongfully use other people, will come to die without faith.

Many people, born in the natural state of Islam, spend their lives in faith but die as unbelievers. Many others, likewise born in the natural state of Islam, live as unbelievers but die as Muslims. As I have said, the good deeds done by those who lack faith will be the cause of their coming to faith at their last breath. Even if they should die without faith, faith will be conferred upon one of their children or grandchildren. They will prosper in this world. They will achieve comfort in this world and they and their families will enjoy its benefits. For those without faith, however, there is no share in the Hereafter. In the absence of faith, they reap the reward for their good works in this world. In the Hereafter, they will enter the Fire on account of their lack of faith.

Such is the case with the majority of those unbelievers who do good in this world and reap its benefits. There is no share in the Hereafter for those without faith. As for believing, but evildoing, wicked and depraved Muslims, they face the likelihood of losing their faith. Even if they do not lose their faith, they themselves will pay the penalty for their evildoing in this world or in the Hereafter, while their children will suffer in this world, where they will face a series of misfortunes. If they themselves pay the penalty here, this will expiate the punishment of the Hereafter. For it does not befit the majesty of Allāh to exact double punishment.

SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

A person coming into this world is like a blind man. He is in darkness. Without faith, he spends his whole life like a blind man. That is why the Glorified and Exalted Lord says that the blind in this world will be blind in the Hereafter also. Allāh did not reveal this Verse about those who are

outwardly blind. He meant to inform us that those who are blind for want of faith and religion will be blind in the Hereafter:

Whoever is blind in this world shall be blind in the Hereafter, and even further astray from the path. [17:72]

Those who live without obeying the commandments of the Holy Qur'ān, live like the blind. For the Holy Qur'ān is like an eye given to us by Allāh. That is why He says:

Clear proofs have come to you from your Lord. [6:104]

The actions of those without faith are similar to the dealings between a blind man and faithless, deceitful cheats. The dishonest traders are Satan and the lower self. The person without faith resembles a blind but greedy buyer. He spends all his money, then, when he needs to buy good things, finds he has wasted his life and done himself irreparable harm. Only in the grave will he learn the nature of his purchases. Going home from market, emptying your sack and finding you have bought nothing but trouble, is a parable for being interrogated in the grave concerning your worldly life, and then facing torment.

A Rude Awakening

A man once went to the public steam bath, where he stretched out on a slab and fell asleep. In his sleep he had a dream. A person exactly resembling himself had also entered the bath, taking the cubicle opposite. It was clear

from the way this man was being treated that he must be someone rich and important. The dreamer went up to the cubicle door to get a closer look at this person so like himself. He saw that the important individual had died in there. The thought occurred to him: “Suppose I change places with this fellow. If I swopped bath towels I could pass for him.” He put this thought into action. When the masseurs came in and saw the dead body lying on the slab, they cried: ‘Help! This man has gone and died here.” Then they carried him out.

Turning to the dreamer, they asked if he had sweated enough. He said that he had, so they washed him down and made him nice and clean. After leaving the bath, he went through the pockets of the dead man’s clothes, which he was now wearing. They contained thousands of dollars. He got into the car that came to take the other man home, went to his apartment and took possession of it. At that very moment, several gorgeous ladies came up to him, saying: “You must be tired after your bath, but please take these drafts that came for you from the bank. It seems you have made a big profit from your estate in such and such a place. They have sent the key to the villa you recently had built. Madame would like to see you ...” At this point came the rude awakening. Stinging from a hard slap, he found himself looking up at the scowling faces of the masseurs. “Get up, you loafer,” they snarled. “You’ve been lying here since this morning. The bath is closing.” Then they grabbed him by the ends and threw him out into the street.

This man’s state is similar to the condition of people who live in this world without faith. What they see is nothing but a dream, as illusory as the villa, the car, the apartment, the women and the rest. As the masseurs brought a rude awakening to the dreamer in our story, the angels of death will come for these people’s souls; then they will realize they have nothing real! ...

Open your eyes. Follow the Holy Qur’ān, that you may find the light and be delivered from the darkness ...

A Prompter Made Redundant

When he was Caliph, °Umar ibn al-Khattāb personally employed an official whose job was to remind him of death three times a day. Thrice each day, this official would go around calling: “°Umar, death exists!” There came a day when °Umar sent for the man and told him he was no longer needed for that job. “O Caliph,” said the officer, “are you giving up that good practice?” By way of an answer, the Caliph pointed to the grey hairs in his beard. “I no longer need your reminders,” said he. “I now have a prompter that will never leave me. Once his hair and beard turn grey, an intelligent man does not need to be told that death exists.”

Following this example, the Ottoman Sultans used to employ salaried officials with the task of shouting at them, as they left the mosque in procession on Fridays and Feast Days: “Be not proud, my Emperor! Allāh is greater than you!” They were under orders to remind the ruler to be just; not to forget that he was mortal and Allāh eternal; that his dominion must come to an end, and that he held it as a gift from Allāh, whose Power and Strength far exceeded his own.

THE ONE BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT

As we have said before, life in the Hereafter is just like life in this world. But with one big difference: this life comes to an end, but the life in the

Hereafter is unending. In other words, this world is transitory, while the Hereafter is eternal. So long as he is here in this world, a creature can exert his own willpower as far as Allāh allows. In this lower world, a creature can "acquire"—that is to say, he wants something and Allāh creates that thing, if He wishes. Here below, it is not incumbent on Allāh to create whatever a creature may want to acquire; He creates or does not create according to His will.

In the world of the Hereafter, Allāh will not create a single thing the unbelievers wish to acquire. But the believers will find their every wish fulfilled by divine grace and favor.

There you shall have what your souls desire, all that you call for shall there be yours; provision from One Oft-Forgiving, Compassionate. [41:31-32]

Qualities like mercy, compassion, tenderness and so on, which are found in all creatures in this world, are but one hundredth part of the mercy of Allāh. The other ninety-nine parts are in store in the Hereafter for believers, lovers and those who are sincere.

HOW TO SEE THE HEREAFTER BEFORE DEATH

Whoever understands the mystery of "Die before you die," Has seen the Resurrection here, before the Trumpet sounds.

Have you grasped the secret of those who die before they die? They have seen the Hereafter in this world already. If you also die before you die, in

other words, if you tame your wild self and walk in the way of Truth, if you learn from what you observe in the universe, you will be able even here to see Paradise, Hell, the Balance and the Bridge, the houries and attendants, the worth of servant and king, the resurrection after death, the reckoning people will undergo, the unbelievers entering the Fire and the believers going to Paradise. In short, all you have heard of as the Unseen. For whatever exists or will come to be in the Hereafter, all has its counterpart here below. Look and see! If you cannot see, beg Allāh to show you! I say again, you can see in this world here a specimen of everything you have believed in as the Unseen, the world of the Hereafter. It is enough that you do not shut your eyes and make some absurd assertion like: “There is no sun in the sky.”

Be sure of foot in the way of Allāh. Strive in His cause with your goods and your life, that you may attain those exalted and everlasting benefits. In this world, everyone who works either sees or does not see the recompense for his efforts. Likewise in the Hereafter, because of our evil deeds we may not see much of the reward for our labors. Anyone who has really worked hard in this world, only to be wrongfully deprived of the fruits of his toil, will recover his losses many times over in the Hereafter.

Those who strive for the Hereafter, but do not guard themselves from hypocrisy and sin, will lose forever the prayers they have kept and all their efforts in the cause of Truth. That is why the Messenger of Allāh says: “Many there are who gain no merit by their prayers. Fatigue is their only profit. Many there are whose fasting yields naught but hunger.”

Let your striving with your life and your goods in Allāh’s cause not be done for the sake of honor and glory! Do it to please Allāh! Seek God’s approval in all you undertake. To please Allāh, avoid all evil things. Abū Hurayra narrates this noble Tradition:

“At the Resurrection, they will bring a man who died in battle into the presence of God. Allāh will order the angels to cast this person into the Fire. When he cries: ‘My Lord, I died in Your cause!’ Allāh will reply: ‘You did not fight to please Me, but that men might call you brave. You got what you wanted. It was not to please Me that you fell a martyr. You were a hypocrite. You did not want Me to see and approve what you did, you only wished to be popular. You won popularity, so now ask the people to reward you, not Me!’ He will then send him to the Fire. Then they will produce a scholar. Allāh will command them to throw this scholar into the Fire. When he cries: ‘My Lord, I used the knowledge you gave me to instruct the people!’ Allāh, Glorious is He, will reply: ‘You did not acquire knowledge in order to please Me, nor was it to please Me that you instructed the people. You used that knowledge to secure worldly advantage. “Let them call me a scholar,” you said. Well, they did what you wanted. They held you in honor. You got the reward for your learning in the lower world; there is nothing for you here.’ Then He will have him cast into the Fire. Next, they will bring forth a warrior, whom Allāh will order to be cast into the Fire. When he cries: ‘My Lord, I fought for the sake of Your religion!’ Allāh will reply: ‘You fought so that they would call you a valiant hero. Well, they called you a hero, they called you brave. You received your reward in the lower world; there is nothing left for you here.’ Next, they will bring into the divine presence a generous rich man, whom Allāh will order to be cast into the Fire. When he cries: ‘My Lord, for Your sake I built a mosque, a hospital and a bridge. I had a well dug and a fountain constructed. I cared for widows and orphans. I helped the needy,’ the Lord will reply: ‘All that you did indeed, but not to please Me! You did it all to be called a good and generous man. You had your reward in the lower world. There is nothing for you here.’ Then he will drive him into the Fire.”

In all you do, therefore, look only to please Allāh. Let people call you what they may. If you are really a good man, what does it matter to you if people call you bad. If you are a bad man, what will it profit you to be called good?

Seek Allāh's approval in all things. First be content with Allāh, then seek His pleasure.

The good pleasure of Allāh is the goal of the Sacred Law, the Mystic Path, Reality, Wisdom, Centrality, Proximity and Service.

"My God, You are my goal and Your approval is my aim."[1]

Whatever you do, do it for Allāh, to please Him! Then none can prevail against you. You will always triumph. Though the whole world oppose you, no harm can befall you. For if Allāh does not wish you to be harmed, what can a creature do to you? Unless Allāh wills it, not a leaf may stir.

The Ascetic and the Gum Tree

There was once a devout ascetic who made his living as a woodcutter. Not far from his village there lived an idolatrous tribe. These people used to worship a gum tree. They regarded this gum tree as a partner of Allāh. The devotee made up his mind to fell this tree of theirs and sell it in the market. "I'll show them," said he, as he set off for their village. "Let me please Allāh by chopping down the tree they worship as Him." On the road he encountered a stranger, who asked him where he was going. "Those stupid fellows worship a tree," he explained, "and I am going to chop it down and sell it in the market." The stranger then revealed his identity: "I am Satan," he said. "I shall not allow you to do this deed." Hearing the man talk like this, the devotee flung himself at the devil and knocked him down as if he had been made of straw, crying: "So you are Satan, eh? What trouble you have caused us!" He jumped on him and trampled him under foot. "Now let

me kill you and deliver people from all your wickedness," he said. But Satan rejoined: "You cannot kill me, for I have been given respite till the Day of Resurrection. It is quite impossible for you to do it, so don't bother to try. Leave the tree alone. In place of the few pennies you hardly get by on, I shall give you a gold piece every day. What difference does it make to you anyway? Why get involved? Is it up to you to set the world to rights?" The devotee accused him of lying, but the devil promised on his oath that he would leave a gold coin under the devotee's pillow every day. W hen the devotee told him he would hear about it if he failed to produce the money, the devil said: "No problem! If I don't come up with the money, you go and cut the tree down!" Having agreed on these terms, they parted company.

The devotee went home satisfied with life. He got up in the morning to find a gold piece under his pillow. No more need he work. He thought a gold coin would be coming each day. He got up the next morning and looked beneath his pillow, but this time there was no money. He picked up the matting and ripped up the floor. Still no money. He got terribly upset. "I'll show you!" he cried as he took to the road. He came upon the devil at the very same spot as before. "You lying Satan; you unbelieving trickster," he yelled, throwing himself at the devil without giving him time to say a word. But he seemed to have hit a rock. This time it was Satan who knocked the devotee to the ground like a bale of straw, then sat on top of him. How had the tables turned? The devotee was confused and annoyed at this turn of events. The devil laughed as he said: "You can't figure this one out, can you? Let me explain. Yesterday you were out to please Allāh. You would have knocked down not just me, but all the devils in the world. He who fights for Allāh's sake will surely conquer. But today you were out for money, not for Allāh. That is why you have been overcome."

Anything undertaken to please Allāh will end in triumph ... Begin all undertakings in His name ... He is with you wherever you may be, so be with Him too! Learn a lesson from everything ... Nothing has been created in vain. Even an ant can lead you to God. Do not say: "Why was the snake

created?” Look for the hidden wisdom behind its creation. Do not say: “What use is a fly?” Enquire into the deeper meaning of it.

A Fly Makes Its Point

A tyrannical ruler was addressing the people, when a fly settled on his face. He chased the fly away. Back it came and again he chased it. The fly was stubborn. It settled on his face once more. He tried to kill it, failed, got angry. He then asked Dahhāk, a scholar who was present: “Why has Allāh created this annoying insect? Doesn’t it seem useless?” Dahhāk replied: “It was created to show tyrants like you how impotent they really are; that they don’t even have the power to dispose of a fly. You may hold sway over human beings, yet a feeble little insect refuses to obey you. It settles on dirt, then comes and alights on the faces of those who imagine they are God. If it could express itself in words, it would say: “You are a nonentity. Do not forget that you are nothing. You may conquer the world, but you cannot conquer me. If Allāh wills, He can kill you, as He killed Nimrod, with a miserable little fly.”

KEEPING A SENSE OF PROPORTION

The true human being fears Allāh, knows Him and loves Him. Fearing Allāh, he must refrain from doing those things Allāh has told him not to do. Loving, praising and remembering Allāh, he must do gladly those things Allāh has told him to do. In respect of the divine prohibitions, he must fear Allāh. In respect of the divine commands, he must love Allāh. Every command should be seen as a blessing and carried out willingly. You should beseech the Lord to accept what you do. You may do, but He may not accept.

However high you rise in this worldly life, you should know your limitations and remember your origins. Keep a sense of proportion, though you rule the world from end to end. You began as a sperm, a drop of vile fluid. You will end up a handful of dust. What is this world but eating, drinking and excreting, then finally the grave? What is the goal of all that striving, ambition, lust and greed? In the last analysis, you have eaten, drunk and defecated. There you have the end of worldly life. This world is nothing but excrement.

Those insatiable eyes will be filled with a handful of dust. A gulp of water will satisfy that greedy mouth. Six feet of earth will contain a man for whom this whole world was too small. The rottenness of worldly ambition is summed up neatly in the lines:

All business rests on bases four:

I eat, you starve; you've less, I've more.

Those who cringe from wearing common cloth may find it their lot to be wrapped in a shroud. Those who shun fleas and lice will have no company in the tomb except serpents, centipedes and wild animals. The glutton will eat and grow fat, only to end up as fodder for the wolves. His faults made public, the egotist will suffer universal scorn.

So do not forget your creation; do not deny your origin! Realize that you are impotent, in need of One who is Mighty! Remember you are mortal, in need

of One who is Everlasting! Do not forget that you are indigent, in need of the grace of the Gracious One. Your Creator is Allāh; Mighty and Wise is He, Existing through His Attributes, All-Embracing through His Essence. You are a lowly subject. If He has given you a little license, do not let your Lord's generosity make you conceited! Acknowledge that you owe it not to yourself, but to Him! Turn back to Allāh, who is Everlasting! Consider your nothingness before His Power and Majesty! In that nothingness, fall in prostration and simply beg of Him! May He, the Gracious One, show you His grace. There is no end to His grace and kindness.

"Who knows himself [his own impotence], knows his Lord."

Āyāz and the Sultan's Dilemma

Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna went hunting one day. He picked up the tracks of a deer. For many hours he rode in pursuit. At length they reached a riverbed, where the deer turned round and looked at Sultan Mahmūd as if to say: "Did you come into this world for the purpose of shooting game?" Hearing this, the ruler gave up chasing the deer. He was sweating blood as he entered a nearby village. The first person he met was a ten-year old boy, to whom he called: "Get me a glass of water, son!" The boy said: "Uncle, my father has gone to fetch water. He will be back soon. Stop and rest here a while." The ruler dismounted. The boy made him sit in a spot sheltered from the wind, then took his horse and walked it up and down a few times. The ruler and his horse were both sweating profusely, but when their weariness had worn off a little, the boy went indoors and brought out a jug of water. "Hey!" said the Sultan, "I thought you told me there was no water here. Didn't you say your father had gone to fetch some?"

“I told you the truth,” the boy replied. “My father did go to fetch water. He’ll be along any moment now. If I had given you water as soon as you asked for it, however, when you were in such a state of perspiration, you might have made yourself sick. You were too hot to think of that at the time. But now you have cooled off, so I brought you some water. See, my father is coming from the fountain. You may have all the water you desire.” At that moment, the Sultan’s ministers and hunting companions reached the village and found their master there. The Sultan was amazed at the wisdom of this village lad. He asked him his name and learned that he was called Āyāz. This shabbily-dressed child was like a ruin containing buried treasure. The Sultan had stumbled upon this hidden treasure. Then Āyāz’s father arrived, carrying a water container, and the Sultan revealed his identity to them both, saying: “I am your Sultan.” Turning to the father, he said: “You shall give this boy to me. I intend to educate him and make him my intimate companion.” Āyāz’s father responded by saying: “My Lord, this is your Kingdom and we are your servants. For your sake I am ready to sacrifice my own life, my children and all that I possess.”

The Sultan then turned to Āyāz and said: “Come, ride with me. There is no need for you to bring anything with you.” He mounted his horse and seated Āyāz behind him, but just as they were about to ride off, the boy cried: “Your pardon, sire! Please allow me to take a few things that are very precious to me.” “Very well,” said the Sultan. “Go and fetch them quickly!” Āyāz popped into the shack, emerged with a bundle in his hand and got back on the horse. Then they rode off together to the Sultan’s palace.

In the palace, Āyāz had to devote part of each day to his studies. He also spent time in the company of the Sultan, whose favor he continued to earn. Each day that passed left the Sultan more impressed by the development of Āyāz’s intelligence and wisdom. He came to be appreciated more and more by his royal master. This did not escape the notice of certain envious people, who began to plot against Āyāz. The Sultan had even entrusted to Āyāz the key to his inner treasury, and this new appointment really made

them mad with envy. Wondering how they might cause Āyāz to fall from favor in the Sultan's eyes, they decided to bring some trumped up charge against him. Eventually, they started to spread the word that Āyāz had stolen from the inner treasury. The Sultan was very distressed when these rumors reached his ears. How could this possibly be? Realizing that these slanderous accusations, if allowed to circulate unchecked, could do more damage to Āyāz's honor than the real thing, the Sultan summoned the envious courtiers and asked them what proof they had to show that Āyāz was a thief. "But sire," they said, "Āyāz is the only one in the palace to keep his door locked. Not once since he first came here has he taken anybody into his room. He has never left his door open. It is obvious he must be hiding something wrong." They then revealed their true colors when they went on to say: "Now you have entrusted him with the key to the inner treasury, which contains innumerable precious stones and other valuables. He must be stealing jewels from there and hiding them in his room. Why else would he always keep his door locked and never let anybody in?"

Sultan Mahmūd was on the horns of a dilemma. If he did not speak out, bad things would continue to be said about someone very dear to him. This he could not tolerate. But Āyāz would be offended if he ordered a search of his room. In the end, however, the second course seemed the lesser of two evils. He therefore decided to put a stop to the envious rumors by having Āyāz's room searched. He would make it up with him later. In any case, Āyāz loved him enough to tolerate his injustice. One day when Āyāz was away from the palace, the Sultan summoned the envious courtiers, saying: "Go ahead and search his room! You can keep anything you find belonging to the treasury!" They broke open the door to Āyāz's room and the envious courtiers trampled one another in a rush to get inside. They found an old mat and a sheepskin rug on the floor, while on the wall there hung a shepherd's crook, a cape and a pair of sandals. "He must have buried it!" they exclaimed, pulling up the floorboards; but they failed to find a single thing belonging to the treasury. Out they came, flushed with shame and disgrace. At least their blushes betrayed a touch of humility, a trace of

humanity within them. There are some who would not be at all dismayed under such circumstances.

When Āyāz returned to the palace, he was surprised to see that his door had been forced open and the contents of his room turned upside down. But he declared himself satisfied as soon as they told him this had been done on the Sultan's orders. Mahmūd received Āyāz into his presence and apologized to him. "Āyāz," he said, "by breaking down your door, I put a stop to their malicious envy of you. If I had not forced your door, they would never have held their wagging tongues." Āyāz responded to this by saying: "Sire, it is right and proper for Allāh to test His servants, the sultan his slave, the Sheikh his disciple and the teacher his pupil. It is insolent impertinence for the servant to presume to test Allāh, the slave his sultan, the pupil his teacher or the disciple his Sheikh. Break down the door, not of my room, but of my heart and search inside; you will fail to find anything but affection for you, leaving no space to stow jewels or worldly goods."

"Āyāz," said the Sultan, "let me ask you something. It seems you kept a shepherd's crook, sandals and a cape, hanging on your wall. What is the significance of these?" Āyāz explained: "Sire, you know about them already. Before I came to serve in the palace, I used to be a shepherd in cape and sandals. Then my self-importance grew as you conferred more and more authority on me. I tried to correct this tendency by saying to myself each night: "Beware of becoming arrogant! You are a shepherd, the son of a shepherd! Do not forget this just because you have found favor with the Sultan! Look, there you see your sandals, cape and crook!"

It would take many volumes to explain this story properly ... Let me say this much about it: This story is an allegorical account of the intimate relations be tween Allāh and a Saint, of Allāh's affection for the Saint and the Saint's affection for Allāh. It deserves to be read and re-read, for it can bring one to

felicity in this world and the Hereafter. Penetrate husk or shell; try and grasp the inner meaning of the tale! Follow the lead of Āyāz. Know your limitations and remember your origins, wherever you may be. Though you be given all the keys of this world, though you rule the earth like Solomon, on him be peace, never forget that Allāh is Greater and more Powerful than anyone, and that you are His servant.

What do you imagine yourself to be? ... How fortunate is he who can really be a “man.” Manhood is not something proved by a moustache and beard. A real man is one whom nothing keeps from the remembrance of Allāh: not money, not status, not property, not children. A man is one who gives up everything, all benefits and advantages for the sake of Allāh. A man is one who performs the prayers, pays the alms-due, and fears none but Allāh and the Messenger, for the sake of the Truth, in the cause of the Truth.

Do not count on your money; one spark and it is gone. Do not rely on your pension, they may take it from you one day. That pension has fooled so many people. The court is not the judge’s property. One stops at the inn, but does not settle in it. The traveler must take the road.

Rely upon Allāh; put all your trust in Him! The road ahead is long and perilous ...

Sayyid al-Khudrī says: “If a person does not feel afraid when he wonders how he would get by without faith, that person will die without faith.” In a Sacred Tradition, Allāh says: “Those who fear Me in the lower world, I shall not cause to fear in the Hereafter!”

OBEDIENCE TO ALLĀH— OR THE TYRANT'S YOKE?

Āyāz Sets an Example of Obedience

One day, Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna handed a priceless cup to one of his ministers, saying: "Break it!" "But Sire," protested the minister, "this is a china cup of great value. How could I break it?" "Very well, that's fine," said Sultan Mahmūd, handing the cup to another minister, who also objected to breaking the cup. Since none of the ministers was willing to break the cup, the Sultan passed it to Āyāz, his close companion, telling him to break it. Āyāz did not hesitate for one moment before dashing the cup to the ground and breaking it. "Wasn't it a precious cup," the Sultan asked him. "Yes," replied Āyāz, "it was very valuable indeed. But your word is worth more to me than this cup. Had I refused to obey the order to break it, though leaving the cup unhurt I would have hurt you. I would sooner break a hundred precious cups like this, rather than give offense to you." So saying, he exposed the hypocrisy of the ministers and set an example of absolute, unqualified obedience to orders.

If Allāh gives you the command, "Do!" you must carry out that command at once. Even if it goes against yourself! ... If you do not obey, you will offend and anger Allāh. Those who love Allāh are obedient to His command. They avoid what He forbids. When His servants are compliant, Allāh puts just rulers over them. For those ruled by the just, this world and the Hereafter become Paradise. Hearts are filled with compassion and tenderness. Gratitude grows among the rich. The country prospers more and more. Every face wears a smile. There is an atmosphere of brotherhood. But if the divine commands are not complied with, if Allāh's prohibitions are ignored, then tyrants come to power. There is no mercy or compassion for the people. Hearts turn to stone. The rich feel no gratitude. The poor lose patience and become discontented. Envy rears its head; mutual hostility

becomes rife among the people; prosperity departs; law and order breaks down and the country becomes a Hell to live in.

Tyrants are Allāh's savage dogs. Whenever a nation strays and becomes corrupt, Allāh makes it subject to a tyrannical ruler. He makes it taste the consequence of its wrongdoing.

Tyranny cannot be imputed to Allāh. His servant pays the penalty for his own wrongfulness. If we become repentant, therefore, the picture changes. Those who wrong us suddenly become just. For it is the Lord of Majesty who converts the heart. Tonight's tyrant can be tomorrow's just ruler, and vice-versa. Do not seek the fault in others! Look for it in yourself! If we correct ourselves, if we adopt the morality of the Noble Qur'ān and the Pure Messenger, then Allāh will promptly replace the tyrant's tyranny with justice. Or else, He will take the soul of the tyrant from him, delivering His repentant servants from his wickedness.

The Shah and the Carpenter

In ancient times, a Shah of Iran called Ferīdūn once glimpsed an extraordinarily beautiful woman, walking in a garden, and fell in love with her. He ordered his men to bring that woman to him but his companions exclaimed: "O king of the world, your command is more to us than life itself. However, this woman has a husband and you have enemies. If we fetch this woman, your foes will make a big issue of the affair and make you unpopular. You will invite this kind of filthy propaganda. But there is always a loophole somewhere. The woman's husband is a carpenter. If you summon him and set him an impossible task, you will be able to execute him for failing to accomplish it. The woman will then be a widow and you will have managed to achieve your goal without causing an uprising."

The Shah liked this idea. They had thought up a very clever plan, but what they did not realize was that Allāh had a plan of His own for them.

The Shah sent for the carpenter. He told the man he would lose his head unless, in the space of only twelve hours, he had made twenty chests out of aloe wood, all finely worked and decorated. Even one such chest would have taken him twelve whole weeks to make, let alone twelve hours. The carpenter realized that he was going to be put to death by the Shah, but what could he do about it?

Sad and unhappy he went back home. When his wife asked what was wrong with him, he told her about his hopelessly impossible situation and began to weep as he sought her forgiveness. As she tried to console him, his wife asked: “Have you wronged anybody?” Replied the carpenter: “I am a man who would not knowingly hurt a living soul. I have wronged no one. Not in my whole life have I laid a finger on anyone’s person, property or honor!” “In that case,” said his wife, “you need have no fear!”

The carpenter became increasingly anxious and fearful as the hours went by. He was all the time beseeching Allāh with heart and soul. When he said to his wife: “My death is only four hours away ... only three hours ...” she replied: “Three hours is a long time. A lot can happen in three hours.”

When the time finally arrived, and he was supposed to deliver the chests to the Shah, the carpenter had not even hammered one nail. With head bowed and tears in his eyes, he looked longingly at his wife: “We shall meet again at the Resurrection,” he said. Hearing an urgent knocking at the door, he went to open it, saying: “Now they have come to take me to my death.” At

the sight of the officers from the palace, he trembled all over and gave way at the knees. “I could not make the chests,” he said. But one of the officers said: “Forget the chests, they are no longer needed! The Shah died in the early hours. You are to make him a coffin. Those are the new Shah’s orders.”

You see, things sometimes turn out this way. Be honest and true! Allāh helps those who are true. Sometimes He unleashes His dogs. Be a worthy servant of Allāh, that you may escape from these dogs. Appeal sincerely to Him, their Master, and be saved from tyrants!

A Lot of Learning, But Little Understanding ...

A student had spent thirty years acquiring knowledge. His teacher said to him: “ Let me ask you a question. If you know the answer, I shall give you your diploma. The question I am going to put to you is not about the Qur’ān or Traditions, yet it is not unconnected with these. If you have understood just a little of what you have learned, if your studies have been at all fruitful, you will be able to answer. But not if you have learned without understanding.”

The teacher then asked his student this question: “How many days’ journey is your home country from here?”

“It takes three months,” the student replied.

“If Allāh wills, you will receive your diploma and make that long journey.”

“Yes, if Allāh has so destined.”

“On your way, will you pass nomad encampments with flocks of sheep, and will they have sheepdogs to guard the flocks?”

“Of course! I will pass all of these on the way.”

“Well then, suppose you were to be set upon suddenly by five or six of those sheepdogs as you were passing by on your way home. What would you do? If you have understood your lessons, if you have got anything from the blessed Qur’ān and Traditions and if history has taught you anything, then you will answer the questions correctly, pass this examination, receive your diploma, go back home and become a preacher whose sermons will benefit the people in this world and the Hereafter.”

The student gave this reply: “My respected teacher! If I encounter savage dogs along the way I shall fight them off with the staff I carry.”

“It is no easy matter to contend with half a dozen savage dogs. You may beat off three, but the other three will bite you meanwhile. That is no answer.”

“I shall drive them off with stones.” “That is not possible either.”

“Then I shall use a gun.”

“In that case you will not escape the owner of the dog. Sheepdogs are very valuable.”

The student had failed the exam. He had not been able to give the right answer to the question. “My son,” said his teacher, “you have learned a lot, but you have not understood. Think things over for a while, then come back to me.” After reflecting for some days, the student approached the teacher again. “Have you found the answer to my question?” the teacher asked him. “No sir,” he said. “I confess my ignorance. Please teach me what I should do.” The teacher then explained: “My son, if you should run into such a situation, do not try to fight the dogs! Leave them alone and call the shepherds at once. The shepherd will tell the dogs not to attack you. You should understand that tyrants are Allāh’s savage dogs. In the life ahead of you, in your own country, you may at any time encounter such tyrants. If you try and fight them, they will bite you and tear you apart. If you kill them, their master will call you to account and you will be condemned. The best course is to appeal to Allāh, the dogs’ true Owner. Only by His grace can you hope to be delivered from such tyrants. What a fine Helper is He!”

In order to escape from tyrants and their wickedness, we must turn back to Allāh, put our trust and reliance in Him and seek His help. For not a leaf in the whole universe can stir without His noble permission.

The tyrant’s tyranny is ended by the victim’s moan. “The tyrant has his tyranny, but the victim has Allāh.” But if the one we suppose to be the victim actually deserves the oppression, in that case the tyrant is only doing his job. As soon as the sufferer repents, the tyrant will become just. Everything depends on us, to the extent that if we are worshipful and

grateful, the sky yields rain and the earth flourishes. But if we are ungrateful for blessings, then no rain falls and the earth is no longer fruitful. Everything is conditional. If we remember Him, God will also remember us. If we give thanks, Allāh gives us increase. If we aid Allāh's religion, Allāh will also give us aid.

Allāh needs neither our remembrance, nor our thanks, nor our aid for His religion:

Allāh is Independent of all the worlds. [3:97]

What we are speaking about is Allāh's "custom." Those who obey the divine command will experience the divine grace. Those who do not obey will be deprived of that grace. They will be losers in this world and the Hereafter.

May Allāh bestow His pardon and forgiveness on the whole Community of Muhammad.

In honor of the Chief of the Messengers. Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds ...

NOTES

[1]ilāhī anta maqsūdī wa-ridāka matlūbī

THE NINETEENTH DISCOURSE

Divine Rememberance

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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So remember Me and I shall remember you. Be thankful to Me and not ungrateful to Me. You who believe, seek help through patience and prayer; surely Allāh is with the patiently enduring. [2:152-153]

Those who remember Allāh standing, sitting or reclining; who contemplate the creation of the heavens and of the earth: ‘Our Lord, You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You! Keep us from the torment of the Fire.’ [3:191]

You who believe, remember Allāh often. [33:41]

And remember Allāh often, that you may prosper. [62:10]

Remembrance of Allāh is greatest of all. [29:45]

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FORBIDDEN PLEASURES

Worship delivers human beings from the troubles and heartache of this world. It gives salvation from the sewer of this world, which resembles the fire of Hell. The troubled life of this world turns to bliss for those who worship. Because of their service to Allāh, they will enter Paradise at the

Resurrection before all the rest, neither abased nor disgraced, their honor intact, their sins unbroadcasted.

People without worship are beset with worry. No matter what they do, no matter what they try, they can find no escape. This is the reason why people without faith or worship become addicted to pleasure and amusement. They blot out their worries for a while through liquor, illicit sex or some other pleasure, but in no time at all their troubles are worse than ever. They look for some fresh amusement, only to add to their woes. They try to treat poison with poison. The disease becomes incurable. Worldly life deceives them like this all the way to the grave.

Once they have reached that gloomy place, not only can they find no more distractions, they must also face the torment of the tomb. After that, they must suffer the humiliation of the Hereafter and go to the blazing Fire.

What are the pleasures of this world? Whatever Allāh has forbidden is a worldly pleasure. Whatever keeps you from Allāh, it is of this world. For instance, earning money is a worldly pleasure. If a person without faith or worship earns money, that money cannot save him from the troubles of this world. If he does not earn money, he cannot escape them either. The soul, being a creature confined within the prison of the body, desires to believe in Allāh and to worship Him. A person who earns money, but lacks faith and worship, cannot satisfy this desire of the soul. Since it cannot attain its object, the soul becomes troubled, worried and depressed. Unable to diagnose his spiritual sickness, the owner of the soul goes and spends his money on liquor and sex. These things give pleasure to his lower self and his physical body. As long as he continues to drink or fornicate, he does not hear the cry of his soul. This treatment is just like giving a tranquilizing pill to a body in pain from cancer. As soon as the effects of the drug wear off,

the pain comes back stronger than before. The sufferer then wants another pill, and so the vicious circle goes on ...

In the end, death comes to the person trapped by the disease of lack of faith, belief and worship. He enters the grave and faces torment. Obviously, the money he made was unable to save him from trouble and heartache ...

Those who try to drown their worries in drink are capable of committing crimes under the influence of alcohol. In fact, the prisons are full of people convicted for this type of crime. They may injure their loved ones, abuse their own parents, spouses and children, or go even further. Drunkenness leads to insanity.

Man’s highest faculty is his intellect. Let a person suffer from any ordinary illness and we will keep him at home and nurse him. But a maniac never! A maniac knows neither what he has done nor what he will do next. He is capable of wrecking the house, setting the whole neighborhood on fire, committing a murder, threatening the lives of his own parents or violating his own children. That is how it is with the insane.

Just as there are various degrees of mental illness, so it is with money-madness also. We do no more than smile at the antics of harmless lunatics. Their behavior is amusing, and so is the crazy way some people handle their money. We are seriously alarmed, however, by the fits of violent maniacs. We commit them to mental institutions and leave them to be treated under lock and key.

Even more dangerous than the violent maniac is the drunkard who may at any moment go wild with his money. Mental illness is unmistakable; we can prevent the insane from doing mischief by having him committed to an asylum. But we can never rid ourselves of the greater danger caused by one who is crazy with his money. A violent drunkard is much more dangerous than a violent maniac. The evidence of this is there before your eyes, in the daily newspaper reports of crimes and dreadful traffic accidents. One crime in a thousand is due to the act of a violent maniac, whereas we hear every day of criminal atrocities committed by drunkards crazy with money.

One Thing Leads to Another ...

Satan had tried hard to lead a certain man astray, but without success. Seeing the devil's maladroitness, a person said to him: "If I can succeed where you have failed, will you get me a pair of shoes I want?" Satan promptly agreed to this proposal. This human devil was an old hag. Waiting for the devotee to pass by, she suddenly released her chickens. Creating an artificial commotion, she appealed to him to help her get the birds back into the coop. Thinking he was being kind to an old lady, he lent her a hand till they got the chickens cooped up again. The old woman blessed the devotee, saying: "Ah, my son! You look like a person whose prayers would be accepted. I have a sick daughter upstairs. The doctors have given up treating her. We don't know where to turn for help. Tike a look at the child, for Allāh's sake."

The devotee was deceived into entering the house. As she closed the door, the old woman pointed to an exceptionally lovely lady and said: "You will lie down and have illicit intercourse with her." The devotee objected: "I take refuge with Allāh from your suggestion!" But the old hag said: "In that case, I shall start screaming. I shall disgrace you by telling people you violated our home. Now get on with the job." Then she pointed to some

wine standing on the table, saying: “Or else drink this.” The devotee preferred to drink wine rather than fornicate, so he had a drink. The wine went to his head and he jumped into bed with the beautiful woman. Just as he was starting to have intercourse, the old hag disturbed the baby in its cradle and made it cry. The noise interfered with the devotee’s enjoyment. “What a time to start crying,” he yelled, beating the infant to death. Now the devotee, who had been afraid of committing illicit intercourse, had been led by drinking into three great sins. In addition to taking liquor, he had both fornicated and murdered. If he had just committed fornication, he would have been guilty of only one sin. He had made light of the sin of drinking, forgetting that it is the beginning of all evils. Once the drink had gone to his head, he had committed the other offenses as well. Such is the way with all who take strong drink. This ill-omened liquid does not stop once it is bottled. The devotee was sentenced to death for his crimes. Satan put the slippers he had promised on the end of a pole and held them out to the old hag. When she asked why he was doing this, he replied: “Because I am scared of your wickedness.”

Some featherbrained people say: “We eat grapes, so why should we not drink the wine that comes from them?” Is the fact that one thing comes from another a good enough reason for consuming it? You drink water at night, then out it comes in the morning. Would you like to drink it then?

The Madman and the Drunkard

A drunken man once went into a steam bath. Seeing the drunkard go in, the owner of the bath said: “Please sir, stay out of the bath today. A dangerous lunatic ran in there this morning. Try as we may, we cannot get him out. You could be harmed.” But the drunkard cried: “Out of my way! He may be crazy, but I am drunk.” Getting undressed, he demanded a sharp razor. With the razor and some soap, he went into the steam room. There he found a

huge man staring at him threateningly with glaring eyes. The drunkard gave a shout, yelling: “Come here!” Then he clouted the madman with all the force he could muster. As the lunatic reeled, he showed him his armpit and said: “Shave me here!” Still smarting, the madman did as he was told. When he had finished, the drunkard gave him a mighty slap on the other cheek, pointed to his other armpit and said: “Now shave here, too.” Again the lunatic obeyed. Then the drunkard let fly a kick that brought the madman to the floor. “Take this razor,” he said, “and give it to the bathkeeper. Then get lost!” Bearing down on the lunatic as if about to strike him again, he cried: “If I find you around when I come out, I’ll do you an injury.” The bathkeeper froze with terror when he saw the madman charging noisily out into the changing room with the razor in his hand. For an awful moment he thought the lunatic must have killed the man inside, but the madman passed the razor to him with one hand, while holding the other to his lips as a way of saying: “Hush!” He whispered: “Take this razor and hide it well away. I am off. There’s a madman inside there,” then made a hasty departure from that place. A violent drunkard is much worse than a violent lunatic.

THE “WINE” OF DIVINE LOVE

Come, let me describe to you a drink on which you may get intoxicated! The cupbearer of that drink is the venerable Sultan of the Prophets, while the drink itself is Divine Love. Its tavern is the assembly of lovers. Its cup is your being. Those who drink it experience no more grief or sorrow; they neither sober up nor separate. They become eternally intoxicated.

The Sultan Visits the Insane Asylum

A Sultan once went to inspect the insane asylum. Knowing that the Emperor was addicted to liquor, the chief physician had laid on a drinking party for the august visitor. The inspection over, the ruler and his retinue settled down to enjoy the drinks. One of the inmates saw them doing this and he started laughing at them.

When the ruler asked him what he found so funny, the lunatic replied: “You were sane, but you liked the idea of madness. Now you are drinking so as to become like me. That’s what makes me laugh.”

If every sin left people drunk, as taking liquor does, there would not be one sober person on earth. Allāh tells us what an evil thing drink is:

Believers, strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are mere filth of Satan’s making. Turn from it that you may prosper. Satan only wishes to cause enmity and hatred among you by means of wine and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allāh and from worship. Will you then not abstain? [5:90-91]

THE MOTHER OF EVIL

Because of its destructive effect on the human mind, damnable liquor is called the mother of evil.[1] It truly deserves this name. The most intelligent man becomes ridiculous if he takes strong drink. Let a respectable person drink and he will lose respect. Let an honorable and worthy person drink and he will be abased and disgraced. There are people who would not exchange their faith for a million dollars, yet when they get drunk they utter such obscenities that religion and faith are cast off. They incur the wrath of

Allāh. A character kept clean for fifty years is no longer worth a nickel. They cause pain to the Messenger, on him be peace, and dismay to his household, to his companions and to the saints of Allāh.

Imām °Alī said: “If wine was poured into a well, then that well was filled with earth, then grass grew from that earth, then some sheep ate that grass, I would not eat any of those sheep!”

ANTIDOTES TO WORLDLY ATTACHMENT

As we have said, making money is a worldly pleasure. A person without faith or worship cannot escape from grief and woe, whether he earns money or not. For his heart is without Allāh, for Whom his soul yearns.

Worship is the means by which to meet Allāh and find union with Him. When a person is unaware that faith and worship are the remedy for his sickness, he uses false medicine to treat his disease. The illness is temporarily checked, only to make itself felt again as soon as the effects of the medicine wear off. The sufferer starts having negative thoughts, such as: “What if they kill me to get at my money?” Not believing in Allāh, he also denies Allāh’s providence: “Suppose I became poor?” Apart from these neurotic anxieties, his lack of belief in the Hereafter also makes him afraid of dying and becoming nothing but dust. Because he has no trust in Allāh, he is finally consumed by worry over the fate of the loved ones he will leave behind.

If he makes no money and can acquire no wealth, then, since he has no faith in Allāh and does not believe in divine providence, he burns himself out as

he watches the lifestyle of his wealthy superiors. He does not realize that Allāh gives knowledge to those who want it, wealth to whomever He wills. Comparing himself with those who have more than he does, he burns with the fire of faithlessness, saying enviously: “That man is more ignorant than I am. How can he be richer than I, when I am more intelligent?” He falls into the fire of Hell and burns there, right here in this world, before entering the Hell of the Hereafter.

It does not cross his mind that this state of affairs is proof of Allāh’s existence. Were there no Provident One, the intelligent and learned would surely take all the top positions and possess the greatest wealth, while the ignorant and foolish would have to die of starvation. When the clever man cannot find bread, he is obliged to stomach the fact that the imbecile has to eat. The ignorant man obliges the learned to take his financial and material needs into account.

All this demonstrates the existence of Someone who manages this universe. But look as they may, the faithless cannot see or recognize the Owner of this Might and Power. Unable to acknowledge His existence, they cannot escape from grief and trouble, be they in plenty or in want. They try without success to dissipate their worries through drinking, gambling or illicit sex. Their troubles get worse from day to day, till some of them even resort to suicide.

In order to escape from misery and trouble in this life, the first remedy is to believe in Allāh, to submit to Him and to remember Him constantly. Perhaps you will object at this point, saying: “But we know many believing people, who do their prayers, keep the fast and remember Allāh, yet still fail to rid themselves of misery and woe.” If so, let me remind you that, as we explained in an earlier chapter, faith falls into three categories:

i. Certainty of Knowledge;

ii. Certainty of Vision;

iii. Certainty of Truth.

In other words, faith on hearsay, faith on visible evidence, faith on experience.

Those who cannot escape trouble, despite having faith and performing worship, are at the stage of faith based on hearsay. Nevertheless, such people are much more at ease in this life than those who are without Allāh and without worship. Their faith, based on Certainty of Knowledge, is often a great consolation to them. As for those who lack faith and do no bodily acts of worship, yet who worship financially by way of charity, helping the poor and so on, their good deeds give them some little respite; despite their lack of faith they do enter the divine presence for a while. This also demonstrates how faith and worship are the means by which human beings have access to the divine presence during this worldly life.

Those who have brought their faith to the levels of Certainty by direct perception and experience are called “beneficent” (sahibu-l-ihsan). Allāh is with the beneficent and the truly devout. On attaining this level, a human comes to be free of misery and woe. It is hearts without Allāh that remain sad and depressed in good times and in bad.

Allāh always remembers those who always remember Him. Through constant remembrance of Allāh, the servant is delivered from sorrow.

Drive out all others from your heart, that God may there appear; The king will not set up his court in a palace that’s unprepared.

The Lord of All Worlds says to those who believe in Him: “Remember Me; do not forget Me.” Remembrance is of various kinds. Everyone should achieve bliss by remembering God according to his station.

REMEMBRANCE OF ALLĀH

Remembrance elevates mankind to the Truth. Let us repeat: Allāh remembers those who remember Him. This is the highest station.

The different kinds of remembrance are: public remembrance, private remembrance, remembrance of the heart, remembrance of the spirit and remembrance of the secret soul.

The best remembrance is: ‘lā ilāha illā-llāh.’

If this Good Sentence were placed in one scale of a balance and the seven levels of heaven and the seven levels of earth were put in the other scale, lā ilāha illā-llāh would outweigh all the rest.

Allāh, Knower of all hidden things, tells us that heaven and earth combined are a “mere scrap” [matā°un qalīl] against the greatness of His remembrance:

Remembrance of Allāh is greatest of all. [29:45]

That Allāh calls something great, is sufficient proof of its exalted nature. If someone says lā ilāha illā-llāh just once with love, he removes four hundred sins. Sorrow and woe are the offspring of sin. And the greatest sin is lack of faith.

THE REMEDY FOR ALL OUR ILLS

The Good Sentence lā ilāha illā-llāh is the remedy for all our ills, healing for body and eye, polish for the heart, nourishment for the soul, key to the mysteries. It burnishes the heart. Allāh’s noble name is polish for the soul, while His divine pronoun “He” [Hū] is the highest mystery of all. Allāh, Glorious is He, says: “Remember Me, that I may also remember you.” If a person says “ALLĀH,” the Lord in His Glorious Majesty replies: “My servant! I am ready. What do you want of Me?” As for the servant, he either hears this divine favor or does not hear it. Either way, he certainly receives an answer from Allāh.

This divine response does not come by sound or voice, nor from a particular direction. It is not spelled out in words. It is like a pleasant taste, and a taste

cannot be described to those who have not tasted it, no more than color to a blind man or music to the deaf ...

In this life here below, human beings have three basic postures: standing, sitting and lying down. A human being should not forget Allāh in any of these three positions. So long as we do not forget Allāh, we can do no evil. A believer who remembers Allāh with his tongue, who does not forget Him in his heart, but whose heart and mouth are in unison, will achieve this divine favor: “My servant, remembering Me as you stand! Be well aware that a Day is coming when all mankind will be on their feet; I shall not forget you in the terror of that Day. Since you do not forget Me, but stand there in remembrance of Me, I shall not forget you on that dreadful Day. Rejoice in My pardon; I shall honor you with My Paradise and My Beauty.”

This is how Allāh addresses the believer who remembers Him while sitting: “My servant, remembering Me while you sit! A Day will come, a Day so terrible that all the Prophets will fall to their knees, thinking of nothing but themselves as they cry: Ourselves, ourselves!’ O My servant, you who remember Me as you sit there, I shall not forget you on that Day. I shall grant you My pardon, shade you in the shadow of My Throne, give you My Paradise and lodge you beside My Chosen one.”

We are told that Allāh will address these words to the believer who remembers Him while lying down: “My servant, you who do not forget Me while lying down! The time is not far off when they will lay you on your side in the grave. You will be left without those you love. They will take you from your soft mattress and lay you on the hard earth. From a prosperous house, they will move you to a desolate hole. From your home so bright, they will take you to a place of darkness. From a house kept clear of snakes, centipedes, scorpions and spiders, they will carry you to a place where those creatures abound. O My servant, you who remember Me as

you lie on your side! I shall not forget you when you come to lie in that dark and lonely nest of snakes and centipedes. That desolate nest, that tomb which is the “box of deeds,” I shall transform into a bed of roses, a garden of hyacinths; I shall make it a Garden of Paradise and you will not be lonely there, for I shall send houries and attendants to wait at your service.”

The bounties obtained by those who remember Allāh are not confined to the Hereafter. They prosper and achieve happiness in this world also. In place of grief, their hearts are filled with joy. Their sorrow turns to gladness. They solve their problems, obtain their desires and reach their goals. Those who say “Allāh” are never disappointed.

You who forget your Lord, who do not remember your Lord, who are thankless and ungrateful for His blessings! You who fall because of this into the ocean of sorrow! You who have no escape from woe in this world and torment in the Hereafter! Come, come to Allāh; come to happiness. The gates of Paradise are open; we invite you to felicity in this world and the Next! Worldly pleasures are no cure for your pain! A thousand misfortunes lie hidden behind each pleasure of this world.

If you drink, your health is ruined, your morals are corrupted. If you go dancing, you tire yourself out. Gambling leads to sighs and tears. If you win, the loser does the sighing and crying. What you regard as pleasure and take for happiness is nothing but pain and sorrow.

Come, worship Allāh! Nothing can be happier than this ...

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Allāh tells us in His Holy Qur’ān that the heart is made tranquil by remembrance of Him. He gives the majestic command: “Remember, that you may achieve success.” Glorify Allāh night and day, morning and evening! For you need Him. He is your Lord. You are His creature. Later, He will cause you to die and again be brought to life, to be taken into His presence. Paradise will be given to those who have faith and do good works, while the highest degree will be earned by those who remember Allāh.

Remember Allāh often! Glorify Him night and morn, that He may look mercifully upon you, bestow upon you His pardon and forgiveness, and bring you out of the darkness into the light; that He may show you truth and reality; that He may let you attain your goal in this world and the Hereafter.

Allāh is Compassionate toward the believers. He loves those who remember Him. He exalts them in this world and the Hereafter. All evil comes from forgetting Allāh. He who remembers Allāh is aware of being with Him always. Allāh is even closer to us than our vital organs. It is we who are far from Allāh.

To the degree that we remember Allāh, we draw close to Him. No veil covers the eye, no wool stops the ear of one who draws near to Allāh. Such a person sees with Allāh, hears with Allāh, holds with Allāh and walks with Allāh. He who sees with Allāh is unerring in his vision.

Spiritual Insight of the Venerable °Uthmān

The third Caliph of the Messenger of the Lord of all worlds was °Uthmān ibn °Affān. He once said to a person who came into his presence: “Go and perform a full ablution before you come here again. Do not sit next to me in a state of major ritual impurity!” The man protested: “But I am not in that state, Commander of the Faithful!” “How can you say that?” said the venerable °Uthmān. “On your way here, did you not look at a woman and commit fornication with your eyes?” The man blushed with shame. “Yes,” he confessed, “I did gaze with lust at a woman who is not my wife.” He then went and performed a complete ablution, after which he was accepted in the Caliph’s presence.

Those who are close to God have insight like the venerable °Uthmān. In a Sacred Tradition, the Knower of the Unseen tells us: “Through the supererogatory acts of worship My servant performs for Me, I draw so close to him that he sees through Me and hears through Me.”

“O Sāriya, the Mountain. . !”

The second true Caliph, °Umar ibn al-Khattāb, was delivering a sermon one day in Medina the Illumined when he suddenly started crying: “O Sāriya! The mountain! O Sariya! The mountain!” After this outburst, he calmly went on with his sermon.

At this time, the Muslim army was doing battle with the Persians at Qādīsiya. Sāriya held an important position in the Muslim army and the unit under his command was under heavy pressure from the Persian forces. The situation was becoming critical when Sāriya heard the voice of the venerable °Umar crying: “O Sāriya, the mountain!” He thereupon pulled his troops back up the mountain. Thanks to the Caliph’s command, the

Muslims not only escaped a serious defeat; by outflanking the Persian army they turned the tables completely.

Medina and Qādīsiya were three months' marching time apart, yet Allāh made °Umar aware of the state of his army as if that distance meant nothing. Perhaps the "spiritual radar" given to the venerable °Umar could have scanned events taking place at distances of three years, three hundred years or three thousand years, while his "spiritual microphone" could have transmitted his voice over equally great distances.

We ought not to be unduly amazed at Allāh's granting such a miracle to the venerable °Umar, who was the gate of the City of Justice. Any human being who worships God above and beyond the call of duty can attain such high degrees, where the eye sees with God and the ear hears with Him. Besides, the Prophet, on him be peace, said of the venerable °Umar: "Were there any Prophet to come after me, if I were not the last of the Messengers, °Umar would be the Messenger to come." We should hardly doubt the capacity of such a being to perform a tiny miracle like this ...

The Holy Qur'ān tells us of the many miraculous powers possessed by the Prophets of the Children of Israel and the saints who were their heirs. To those who follow the hypocrites in casting aspersions on the venerable Abū Bakr, °Umar, °Uthmān and °Alī, or on the pure wives and others close to Muhammad, I offer this reminder: everything the Messenger said and did was from Allāh. Of this we find ample evidence in the Holy Qur'ān, including the Verse:

Nor does he speak out of caprice. It is no less than a revelation revealed. [53:3-4]

Certain Iranians are implacable foes of the venerable °Umar. In fact, it was the venerable °Umar whose conquest of Iran brought its people to Islam and ensured their happiness in the Hereafter. Without an °Umar, the Muslims might have found it rather difficult to conquer the great Persian Empire ...

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Qārūn Falls Into His Own Trap

Qārūn was very proud of his wealth and property; it was more than he could stomach when his cousin, the venerable Moses, began calling his people to Allāh. Jealousy and envy prevented him from believing in the Prophethood of Allāh's Converser. He went to a prostitute and said: "Listen to me. Tomorrow, Moses will be communicating the divine commandments. If you interrupt him with the false accusation that he once fornicated with you in a certain place, I promise to make you comfortable for the rest of your life. I shall make you so rich that your relatives and dependents will inherit a fortune from you when you die." The prostitute immediately agreed to this proposal. The next day came and the people gathered in the temple. Moses, on him be peace, ascended the pulpit in the presence of them all. He began to read Allāh's commandments from the tablets that had come down from Him. As he was saying: "The murderer shall be put to death! The adulterer shall be stoned to death!" Qārūn gave a signal to the prostitute. It was the moment for her false accusation to be made. Qārūn stood up and asked: "Do these commandments apply only to your community, or are you yourself subject to them also?" "Of course," replied the venerable Moses, "I am a servant too; the commandments are universal. If I should fall into such error, I must suffer the same penalties." Then Qārūn said: "Moses! Hear

what this woman, whom we all know, has to say about you." All eyes turned to look at that wicked woman.

They say a dog whose time has come will urinate on the mosque wall. Now Qārūn's time had come. He wished to defile the glorious Prophet. The venerable Moses and all his people turned to listen to the woman. She rose to her feet, while Qārūn laughed up his sleeve. What a clever trick he thought he was playing. But inted her finger at Qārūn, saying: "Moses, this man came and offered me money if I would slander you." Then she listed all the things he had promised her. Qārūn had fallen into his own trap. Allāh had turned his clever trick around against its author. God was speaking through the woman's mouth. Qārūn did not know what had hit him. His laughter turned to woe. His wealth and property were useless to him now. He was disgraced. The people of Moses spat in his face.

They schemed, and Allāh schemed; but Allāh is the best of schemers. [3:54]

The venerable Moses was deeply offended by the false accusation. Knowing himself to be very quick-tempered, he referred the matter to Allāh. The Lord God said to him through inspiration: "I have put the earth at your command. Do with Qārūn as you will!" Having received this divine permission, Moses, Allāh's Converser, said to the earth: "Earth, swallow up Qārūn!" As soon as these words were spoken, Qārūn began sinking into the ground as if it had become quicksand. Sinking steadily deeper and deeper, he groaned: "I made a mistake, Moses! Pardon me!" But the Prophet Moses sternly repeated the command: "Swallow him! Swallow up this slanderer!" Qārūn finally sank beneath the earth, in which he is sinking yet ...

The venerable Moses heard some mischief-makers saying that he buried Qārūn in order to get his hands on that miser's wealth. To stop these rumors

and to ensure that his people did not suspect his motives, he therefore ordered all Qārūn's treasure to be buried also. The Prophet Moses' orders were carried out and all Qārūn's wealth disappeared forever into the earth. Allāh then said to the venerable Moses: "Moses! As Qārūn was sinking into the ground, he pleaded with you to pardon and save him, but you did not grant him pardon. If he had slandered Me as he slandered you, and if he had once remembered Me and called on Me in remorse: 'O Lord, pardon me. Spare me!' I swear by My Essence of Divinity that I would have pardoned Qārūn."

ALLĀH, THE FORGIVER OF SINS AND VEILER OF FAULTS

When Allāh pardons those who say His name just once with love, will He not surely pardon those lovers who remember Him night and day? Will He deprive those lovers of His Grace, His Paradise and His Beauty? . . Far be it from Him!

Therefore, we are told, if a person flings another's fault in his face, be it in public or in private, the earth itself appeals to Allāh to let it deal with the one who exposes the other's fault. "My Lord," says the earth, "You are the Lord of All Worlds, yet You cover up the sins of Your servants, rather than flinging them in their faces. This man, himself a sinner, has disgraced a servant of Yours by exposing his offense. Pray permit me to swallow up this fellow, as I swallowed Qārūn."

If a person sees another's sin, yet hides the fault he has seen and does not divulge it to others, Allāh will cover up seventy of that person's sins and faults and will pardon those hidden sins on the Day of Resurrection.

He is the Forgiver of sins and Veiler of faults.

Cover up the faults of others, that your own sins may be hidden! Pardon, that you may be pardoned! Do not throw people's wrongs in their faces, lest the same be done to you.

You may be aware of one sin of your enemy's, one fault of your foe's, but Allāh knows about a thousand and one sins of yours ... If you broadcast a person's sin, suppose he repents for it? If he has become dear to Allāh, Allāh will defend him against you. Suppose Allāh exposes a sin of yours, what will you do then? Who will there be to cover up that sin of yours once it has come into the open?

Give aid to the poor! Send away happy the beggar who comes to your door. If you disappoint him, some tyrant may later snatch from you what you would not give willingly. To give water to the thirsty, to hide people's shortcomings and to help the poor, these constitute the Station of Gabriel. Seize the opportunity now and practice this beautiful form of worship! If you let this chance slip, a day may come when nothing can bring it back, not your physical strength, nor your money, nor your rank.

The Bruised Shoulders of Imām °Alī

The cruel Ibn Muljam made a martyr of Imām °Alī. When they laid out his blessed body on the bench for washing, they noticed that his shoulders were bruised. The companions of °Alī asked Imām Hasan and Imām Husayn the cause of this bruising. Said the venerable Hasan the Chosen: "When everyone in Kūfa had gone to bed for the night, he used to go about until

morning, carrying provisions on his back." Unknown to anyone, our Master the noble Victor of Khaybar, the Cupbearer of Kawthar, used to go out each night, bearing food and fuel on his back. The weight of his burdens had caused the ropes to cut into his shoulders.

DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES OF SO-CALLED "SECTS"

For the benefit of those who wonder about the "sects" in Islam, we shall attempt to answer the questions: Who are the Sunnīs; who are the Yazīdīs; who are the Khārijīs; who are the Zaydīs? But first let us tell a little story:

Blind Men Describe an Elephant

Several blind people were brought into a large tent, where an elephant was kept. "Now you can find out what an elephant is," they were told. Each blind person felt a different part of the elephant's body. After they had come out of the tent, one of them was asked: "What does the elephant resemble?" From the reply: "The elephant is like a pillar," it was clear that this blind man had felt the animal's leg. "No," said another, "the elephant is more like a wall." A third disagreed, saying: "Like sailcloth," while a fourth cried: "Like a hose." Each of them was right, of course. The one who had felt the elephant's belly compared it to a wall; the one who compared it to sailcloth had felt its ear; the one who said it resembled a hose had felt its trunk ... The elephant's body did have all those parts, but they were not the elephant.

Those who are dogmatic in matters of faith and belief are like the blind men describing the elephant. Each is right up to a point, but the whole truth

emerges only if they get together and harmonize their conflicting views, instead of criticizing one another and fighting in the dark.

In the light of this story, let us now try to explain how the following groups differ in matters of religious doctrine:

a. The Sunnīs:

In respect of beliefs, I belong personally to the group called “People of the Prophet’s Path and of the Community.”[2] In respect of practice, I belong to the school of Islamic Law founded by Abū Hanīfa. That is to say, I am a Hanafī. On the Sufi path, I trace my roots to the venerable Husayn, and through him to the Prophet, Allāh bless him and give him peace. In other words, I am a Husaynī. To Allāh belongs the praise.

The Sunnīs:

i. Believe in Allāh and His Messenger. They acknowledge with their tongues, and confirm in their hearts, all the fundamental articles of faith, namely:

“I believe in Allāh, in His angels, in His books, in His Messengers, in the Resurrection after death, in the Last Judgment, and that destiny, good and bad alike, is from Allāh, Exalted is He.”

ii. Love and respect all the Companions of the Messenger of the Lord of All Worlds. Thus they love and respect Abū Bakr, °Umar, °Uthmān, and °Alī.

iii. Love and respect the children of Muhammad and his wives and his friends, and also Imām °Alī, his wives, and his children.

They in no way condone the rebellion mounted against Imām °Alī. They acknowledge Imām °Alī the Approved as a true exponent of the Law. They consider the transgression made against Imām °Alī to have been unlawful, and they have no love for those who brazenly committed that transgression. They recognize Imām °Alī's right to the Imāmate. They maintain that Mu°āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān was a misinterpreter of the Law. They love Imām Hasan, Imām Husayn, and their offspring. In every one of their prayers they pronounce benedictions on the Family of Muhammad.

It was not the Sunnīs who martyred Imām Husayn. No Sunnī approves of this. The Sunnīs have no love for Yazīd, nor for those who love Yazīd. However, they do not recite maledictions against him. This is not because they have any respect for him, but because they do not wish to soil their tongues by uttering curses. Malediction brings no reward in the Hereafter. That is why we prefer to recite abundant blessings for the Family of Muhammad ... We Sunnīs have no love, either, for those who despise the other Twelve Imāms or the Fourteen Innocents.

In obedience to Allāh's command, they perform the five daily prayers, make complete ablution, observe the fast for one month in each year. If they have the means to do so, they make Pilgrimage during the proper season once in their lives. Each year they contribute one fortieth of their wealth for the benefit of their Muslim brethren. They hold unlawful what Allāh has

forbidden in His Book, and lawful what He has allowed. They do not drink wine.

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b. The Yazīdīs:

The Yazīdīs believe in Allāh, whom they recognize as the God of goodness. They also worship Satan, whom they regard as the god of evil. They call Satan “The Peacock King.” According to them it is unnecessary to worship Allāh, but Satan must be worshipped so that he will not cause mischief.

Believing that Mu°āwiya served as barber to Muhammad, on him be blessings and peace, they say that he once cut our Master while he was shaving him. They maintain that Mu°āwiya sucked the blood from the cut, swallowing the Light of Prophecy along with it. They claim (perish the thought!) that this Light of Prophecy then passed from him to Yazīd. They are hostile to Imām Hasan and Imām Husayn. They call the Sunnīs “Husaynīs.”

They believe that a Yazīdī who kills a Sunnī will go to Paradise without being questioned. They drink wine and neither perform complete ablution nor pray towards Mecca (they face the sun instead). They do not recognize the Companions of the Prophet. They do not accept the Noble Qur’ān. They believe in two scriptures, which they call the Book of Feathers and the Black Book.

Such are the Yazīdīs. Clearly, they have no connection with the Sunnīs ...

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c. The Khārijīs:

They believe in Allāh and His Messenger, as they believe in the Qur’ān, the angels and resurrection after death. They perform the five daily prayers, fast, make Pilgrimage, pay the alms-due and accept the unlawful as unlawful and the lawful as lawful. They show love and respect for Abū Bakr and °Umar, may Allāh be pleased with them both, but they do not like the venerable °Uthmān, Imām °Alī or Mu°āwiya.

They say, unfortunately, that °Alī and Mu°āwiya went against the judgment of the Qur’ān and became unbelievers.

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d. The Zaydīs:

Imām Zayd was the son of the venerable Imām Zayn al-°Ābidīn. The Zaydīs are indistinguishable from the Sunnīs in matters of theological doctrine. However, they give precedence to Imām °Alī above all the other Companions. According to them, his status is not impaired by his having been the fourth Caliph, just as the status of the Qur’ān is not diminished by

its being the fourth of the major Books. They say that as the Noble Qur’ān is the most excellent of the Scriptures, although it came fourth in time, so Imām °Alī, being the fourth Caliph, is the most excellent of them all.

In matters of law, they follow the doctrines of the Prophet’s Household.

CHARACTER OF THE VENERABLE °UMAR

Let us now say something about the character of the venerable °Umar, that most holy individual who was martyred by a Persian slave. Rather than introduce him through my own panegyrics, or the strictures of his Shī°ī and °Alawī critics, I shall relate what is written about his character in the Lemezāt by the venerable Sunbul Sinan. The reader can then reach his own conclusions.

°Umar Asks to be Buried Next to the Blessed Prophet

One day during his Caliphate, the venerable °Umar sent word to our Mother the venerable °Ā’isha’s, asking whether, in the event of his death, she would consent to his being buried beside the Glory of the Universe. The Mother of the Believers replied: “I consent to °Umar’s being buried there.”

The room in which our Master was buried had been °Ā’isha’s apartment. It was in that very room that he had passed on to the Truth, to the World of Beauty. They had buried our Master where he lay, in accordance with the noble Tradition: “Prophets are buried where they meet with God.”

When °Ā'isha's beloved father, the venerable Abū Bakr, also went to meet God, she had him buried beside the Messenger of Allāh. Now the venerable °Umar wished to enter this same Paradise and had received permission. He nevertheless turned to those with him and said: "Seek °Ā'isha's consent to my being interred after my death in the Resting Place of the Messenger."

"O Commander of the Believers!" they exclaimed, "You have already received permission!" "Indeed I have," said he, "but maybe the Mother of the Believers could not bring herself to refuse me to my face. Ask her permission again after my death. If she agrees, take me before the Purified Resting Place and set my bier down in front of the blissful room, saying: "O Messenger of Allāh! We have brought °Umar to you." If you receive a sign, you are to bury me in the Prophetic Resting Place, at the feet of the Messenger and to the right. In the absence of a sign, however, you are to bury me in the Garden of the Grove, the cemetery of Medina."

The day came when, by divine destiny, the venerable °Umar drank the wine of death, martyred by a Zoroastrian slave. In accordance with his bequest, they again asked permission of the venerable °Ā'isha.

When she repeated her consent to his burial in the Prophet's room, they took his bier to the Prophetic Resting Place. Imām °Alī turned to the blessed tomb and cried: "O Messenger of Allāh! We have brought °Umar to you." The voice of the Glory of the Universe was heard, saying from within the tomb: "Bring °Umar to me!"

Now do you understand who °Umar is, and who you are?! . .

RESTING PLACES OF THE BLESSED PROPHET'S FAMILY

Remember that the room where the noble Messenger of Allāh lies buried belonged to the venerable °Ā'isha. It was in that very room that our Master, God's dearly beloved, the mercy to all mankind, the sultan of the Prophets, met with his Lord on the bosom of our Mother, the venerable °Ā'isha; and there he was buried. Abū Bakr, the noble father of our Master's revered wife °Ā'isha was later buried in that room.

Abū Bakr was the father-in-law of the noble Messenger of Allāh. Later still, by leave of the venerable °Ā'isha, the room became the burial place of °Umar ibn al-Khattāb, son-in-law of both the noble Messenger and of Imām °Alī. If the noble Hasan had also been buried there, the Purified Resting Place would have become the cemetery of the Prophet's Household. It should be carefully noted that even the venerable °Ā'isha lies buried not in the Resting Place but in the Garden of the Grove, where the third Caliph, °Uthmān of the Double Light, is likewise interred ...

After our Master, no one but the venerable Abū Bakr and °Umar, was buried in the Resting Place. The interment of the venerable Hasan the Chosen in the Garden of the Grove ensured that part of Muhammad would lie there.

According to one account, Fātima, the Best of Women, is also buried in the room of her father, the noble Messenger who is a mercy to all mankind. According to another version, she lies in the Garden of the Grove.

The household of the Chosen Prophet, the family of Muhammad, are light, light ...

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Let us love the noble Prophet, and refrain from dragging the names of his family into futile disputes! Have affection for the people of his household, his wives and his offspring! Respect his companions, that you may have dignity in both worlds and enjoy his intercession!

Do not forget Allāh! Remember Allāh! A person often remembers the one he loves! Those who remember Allāh neither cause any harm nor suffer disappointment. Tranquility of heart is remembrance of Allāh. Remembrance of Allāh is great. Those who remember Him are sure to find success. My Lord, keep us ever in remembrance and thought of You! Let us feel the taste of divine remembrance, for You remember those who remember You ... Do not part us from Your beloved Muhammad! Grant that we may recite the Holy Qur'ān, the supreme remembrance, and that we may act in accordance with it, sincere in all our actions! Adorn our tongues with the remembrance of Allāh! Illumine our hearts with the remembrance of the Qur'ān and the light of the affirmation of Divine Unity! Make our faces bright and our hearts clean! Purify us inwardly and outwardly! With our last breath let us utter the Holy Qur'ān and the affirmation of Divine Unity! Your beloved tells us that we shall enter Paradise if our last words are the affirmation of Divine Unity; do not begrudge us this bounty! ...

Make our tomb a Garden of Paradise! ... When we rise from the grave, send us the steeds of Paradise to ride ... Assemble us with the remembrancers and lovers beneath the banner of Your beloved. Shade us in the shadow of the Throne. Let us drink the water of Kawthar from the hands of your

beloved, of Hasan and Husayn and of Haydar the Impetuous Lion. At the Balance, let us receive the record of our deeds from the right hand side. Do not disgrace us before the people at the Place of Resurrection by exposing our faults! Do not shame us in the presence of Your saints and Prophets! Cover our faults and pardon them! Treat us not with Your justice, but with Your pardon! Deliver us from Your Fire. By Your grace and kindness, admit us to Paradise on high! Let us cross the Bridge like lightning, drink the waters of life, then find lodging in the highest Paradise, near to the Chosen One!

Make true Muslims of the wayward members of the Community of Muhammad; convert their hearts to the religion of Islam! ...

Cause us not to suffer the tyrant’s yoke! Keep our virtue, our honor and all we hold sacred from being trampled beneath the heel of the foe! Grant salvation to all the Muslims and people of faith. Unite our hearts as one!

In honor of the Chief of the Messengers. Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds ...

NOTES

[1]ummu-lkhabā ’ith

[2]ahlu-lsunna wa-ljamā°a. This group represents the vast majority of the Muslims.

THE TWENTIENTH DISCOURSE

The Birth of the Blessed Prophet

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

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There has now come to you a Messenger from among yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering; anxious is he over you; toward the believers kind and compassionate. [9:128]

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The night of the Prophet’s birth is the most exalted of all nights. It is even superior to the Night of Power. If this night had never been, if the being who ennobled it had not come into existence, there would have been no Heavenly Pedestal, no Preserved Tablet, no Ultimate Lotus Tree, no Paradise, no Hell, no heaven, no earth and no mankind. For all these were created in honor of the being w ho came on this night. All things came into existence for his sake. For he is God’s beloved, the Lord’s desired, the friend, physician and Messenger of Allāh; he is Ahmad, chief of the Messengers and prince of the Prophets; he is the Envoy to men and jinn; he is the light, the radiant lamp, the healer of the suffering, the refuge of the poor, the friend of the weak; he is the Chosen, the Select; he is a mercy to the universe; he is the intercessor of the sinful; he is the Messenger of the Lord of All Worlds.

To cite just one of the thousands of Qur’ānic Verses that prove his high degree in the divine sight:

By the bright forenoon; and by the night when it is still! [93:1-2]

O lovers of Muhammad, who is it who swears this oath? It is none other than Allāh, All-Powerful Creator of heaven and earth! Do you know by which forenoon He is swearing? It is the forenoon following this night, when His beloved

Muhammad became manifest and the whole universe was immersed in light and gladness.

You see, Allāh swears by the morning of this night, when His beloved appeared and arose; this Primal Light, this Radiant Light that is the Final Prophet.

The date was in the Year of the Elephant, when Abraha came to destroy the Ka°ba, only to be destroyed along with his own army. Fifty-two days after that momentous event, in the forenoon following the twelfth night of Rabī°u-l Awwal ...

This was the moment when the noble Āmina painlessly delivered into this world the Chosen Messenger, the King of Prophets.

Our Master, the Lord’s beloved, was born already circumcised and with the umbilical cord already cut; his blessed eyes were already anointed with collyrium. As soon as he had been delivered, he prostrated himself and begged his Lord to give him his Community. Many portents had occurred in the world that night:

In the palace of Chosroes, fourteen towers suddenly collapsed.

Lake Sava dried up.

In the temples of the Zoroastrians, fires that had been burning for a thousand years were suddenly extinguished.

The waters of Lake Tiberias overflowed.

All the idols in the Ka°ba fell on their faces; the three major idols, called al-Lāt, al-°Uzzā and Manāt, were shattered to bits. Voices proclaimed from the walls of the Ka°ba: “Good tidings! Tonight the sun of the universe has been born. He will soon deliver us from the polytheists and their idols. His Community will circumambulate us barefoot and will find union with the True God!”

All worlds were immersed in light. The universe was transformed. The soothsayers were struck dumb. Mountains, rocks and trees all made prostration. The Ka°ba prostrated itself, then stood erect without leaving one stone on the ground. The polytheists were bewildered at the sight of what was happening that night.

On that night, this world was ennobled by the seal of the Prophets, the last of the Messengers, the beloved of Allāh, the refuge of the poor, the friend of the weak, the mercy to the eighteen thousand worlds, Ahmad in heaven and Muhammad on earth. The color of water turned to light. At last the tyrant’s neck would be bowed and the oppressed would smile again. For a bringer

of good tidings had come to the believers; one had been sent to put fear into the unbelievers and tyrants.

THE MONTHS OF THE VENERABLE ĀMINA'S PREGNANCY

The venerable Āmina tells us: "It was the month of Rajab when I realized that I was pregnant with Muhammad. One night, a being suddenly entered the room where I happened to be. I had never seen this being before. He had a lovely face and a graceful body. I trembled with fright. Peering into my heart, he pointed to the innocent in my womb and gave the salutation: "Peace be upon you, O Muhammad! Peace be upon you, O Ahmad!" I asked: "Who are you, sire?" and that noble being disappeared, saying: "I am Adam the Pure, Father of Mankind. I came to congratulate you. Good news and glad tidings to you, O Āmina. You are carrying Allāh's beloved, the prince of humankind!"

"In the second month, i.e., the month of Sha°bān, a being suddenly appeared to me again one day. This most holy being was bathed in light. Pointing at me and the infant in my womb, he said: "Peace be upon you, utterly beloved! Peace be upon you, ultimately sought!" In fear, I asked him: "Who are you?" and he replied: "Fear not, O Āmina. I am the Prophet Seth. I came to congratulate you. O Āmina, you are carrying the beautiful Prophet and glorious Messenger." Having said these words he vanished.

"In the third month of my pregnancy, an imposing and radiant being again came in one day. Peering into my heart, he gave the salutation: "Peace be upon you, O Enwrapped One.[1] Peace be upon you, O Cloaked One."[2] When I asked him: "Who are you, sire?" he disappeared saying: "I am the Prophet Idrīs. Congratulations to you, O Āmina! You are carrying the leader of all

the Messengers, the venerable and glorious Prophet, on him be blessings of the All Merciful One."

"In the fourth month, there suddenly appeared to me one day a most holy individual, darkskinned, handsome and radiant of countenance. Looking into my heart, he pointed to the infant in my womb and gave the salutation: "Peace be upon you, O Purest of Creatures!" "Who are you, sire?" I asked. "Be not afraid of me," he said. "I am the venerable Noah. I came to offer my congratulations to you, O Āmina! My felicitations on your being pregnant with the praiseworthy Prophet, the glorious Prophet who is the master of victory and triumphs"

"In the fifth month, again one day there appeared to me a being of perfect beauty, his face all bright with light. Looking into my heart, he indicated the child in my womb and gave the greeting: "Peace be upon you, O Adornment of the Messengers! Peace be upon you, O Seal of the Prophets!" When I asked who he was, that illuminated being replied: "I am the Prophet Hūd. I have been sent to greet you with good tidings. Congratulations to you, O Āmina! You are carrying the praiseworthy Prophet, Allāh's beloved who is the master of munificence and generosity." Then he disappeared.

"In the sixth month, a radiant being again appeared to me. He looked at my breast, pointed to the infant in my womb and gave the greeting: "Peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allāh! Peace be upon you, O beloved of Allāh!" When I asked him who he was, he vanished, saying: "I am Allāh's special friend, the Prophet Abraham. I was sent to bring you glad tidings. Good news, O Āmina! You are carrying the glorious Prophet, the ultimate Messenger, beautiful of countenance."

“In the seventh month, it again happened that I saw a charming being with comely countenance. He peered into my heart, pointed to the child in my womb and gave the salutation: “Peace be upon you, O Prophet of Allāh! Peace be upon you, O Choice of Allāh!” I asked who he was and he said, as he disappeared: “I am the Prophet Ishmael, sent to greet you with good news. Congratulations to you, O Āmina! You are carrying the gentle Prophet, a Messenger whose lineage is sound, in speech most eloquent, in worth pre-eminent.”

“In the eighth month, a radiant being again appeared. He was tall of stature and his face was shining bright. He looked into my heart, pointed to the infant in my womb and gave the greeting: “Peace be upon you, O beloved of Allāh, the All-Forgiving! Peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allāh, the Irresistible!” When I asked him who he was, that being said: “I am the venerable Moses. Good tidings and congratulations to you, O Āmina! You are carrying that ultimate Messenger who is chief of the descendants of °Adnān, the Prophet to whom was revealed the Qur’ān, he who is perfected by al-Rahmān [the All-Merciful].” Then he disappeared.

“In the ninth month, another being appeared to me. His clothing was of wool. His face was radiant. Looking into my heart, he pointed to the innocent in my womb and gave the salutation: “Peace by upon you, O Prophet of Allāh. Peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allāh!” When I asked who he was, that most holy being replied: “I am Jesus, son of Mary. I am the Messiah, sent to bring you good tidings and felicitations. Congratulations to you, O Āmina! You are carrying the Lord’s beloved, who is a mercy to the universe. Make ready, for the time to give birth is very near at hand!” With these words he disappeared.

Thus did the venerable Āmina learn the good tidings of the noble coming of the Lord’s beloved. Up until the year in which the venerable Āmina became

pregnant with the Most Noble Messenger, it had been a time of unprecedented scarcity in Mecca. A violent wind swept the land. But when the Lord's beloved was conceived in his mother's womb, God, Exalted is He, granted the people a blessed respite in his honor. The wind dropped and the rains came. People recovered their peace of mind and were happy again. The Arabs even called that year the "Year of Plenty."[3] Through the fortunate and blessed influence of our Master, the women who became pregnant that year all bore male children and were very happy. For male children were prized by the Arabs in the Age of Ignorance, while they would sometimes kill baby girls.

DREAM OF THE VENERABLE °ABD AL-MUTTALIB

As our Master's birth approached, the venerable °Abd al-Muttalib called the venerable °Abdullāh to his side saying: "My son, I had a strange dream about this noble child of yours who is soon to be born. All the People of the Book are predicting that the final Prophet will appear this year. They say this Prophet will be an Arab of the tribe of Quraysh and a Meccan. In my dream, a being appeared to me and said: 'To your grandson, about to be born to °Abdullāh and Āmina, you shall give the name MUHAMMAD.' Until now, nobody among our people has been called Muhammad. I am inclined to think this child is the final Prophet. All the signs point to this. It is known throughout the whole Arab nation and maybe to all mankind. The People of the Book, especially, are awaiting the noble coming of this most holy being. In the spiritual world of dreams, you and I have many times been shown the glorious, sublime and exalted dignity of the noble child about to be born unto us. We must now prepare to welcome him. This is the season for dates. Medina is famous for its dates, so go there and buy some."

The noble °Abdullāh went to Medina to buy dates. On the way back to Mecca, he died, two stages out of Medina. There he passed over to the

world of the Hereafter. The beloved of Allāh was left without a father while still in his mother's womb. All the angels were moved to tears and begged the Exalted One to explain: "O Lord," they said, "what is Your wise but mysterious purpose in leaving fatherless, while still in his mother's womb, Your noble beloved, the most highly honored of all Your servants, in whose honor You created the whole universe? Tell us, O Lord." The Exalted One said: "My angels, a father's function and duty is to bring up, train and protect his sons, but My beloved needs no one but Me to bring him up, train him and take care of him. While other children call 'daddy' when they need help and support, My beloved Muhammad will call for Me, saying: 'O Lord!' I have left him fatherless so that he will not turn for help and assistance to anyone but Me." Our Master, the Messenger, on him be blessings and peace, says in a Noble Tradition:

"My Lord trained me, and He trained me well."

When the venerable °Abdullāh died, his entire inheritance consisted of a flock of sheep, five camels and an Abyssinian slave girl called Umm Ayman, who was a wet nurse.

BIRTH OF THE BLESSED PROPHET

It was in the forenoon of a Monday that our Master, the noble Messenger, was born. His migration from Mecca, his arrival in Medina, his final revelation, his ascension and the conquest of Mecca, all happened on a Monday. It was on a Monday also that he left to honor the world of eternity.

The birth of our Master, the noble Messenger, occurred on the forenoon of Monday, the 12th of Rabī°u-l'Awwal, which coincided with the 20th or 21st of April. That is why April rains have always been blessed, refreshing and a cause of prosperity. On the eve of our Master's birth, the Ka°ba split in two. The Quraysh were terrified by this occurrence and offered many explanations of it. Some of them suggested that it was due to the fact that the venerable Āmina's father had gone to the eternal world that night. For Wahb ibn °Abd Manāf, the maternal grandfather of the venerable Messenger, was a revered figure among the Arabs. News of his death was spreading in Mecca on the eve of the Prophet's birth.

While Quraysh were involved in these discussions, they heard a voice from inside the Ka°ba saying: "O tribe of Quraysh, the Ka°ba has not been made the cause of anyone's death. However, Muhammad ibn °Abdullāh, the light of this world, the glory of the Hereafter, the lamb of Paradise, is about to emerge from his mother's womb. He is a most noble Messenger who will cleanse the Ka°ba, which the polytheists have polluted with their idols, false gods and blasphemous transgressions. Cleansing it of their errors and abuses, he will restore my beauty to its former radiance and fill me with the light of faith. He will make me the direction towards which men turn in prayer and his community will come from distant places to make annual pilgrimages to me, the Ka°ba." Thus, the Ka°ba itself spoke to the Quraysh who heard its voice say: "There is the honor on account of which I split in two."

On the eve of our Master's birth, Allāh gave this command to His angels: "On the Morning when My beloved is born, you are to open all the gates of heaven, make Paradise beautiful, open all the levels of Paradise and the gates of its eight gardens!"

That day the sun shone brighter than on other days. Its brilliant radiance lit up the entire world so that all the people on earth might rejoice in the awareness of the noble coming of the Primal Light, the venerable Muhammad Mustafā.

The venerable Āmina says: “I was about to give birth to my Muhammad. There was no one with me, neither man nor woman. My father-in-law, °Abd al-Muttalib, had gone to circumambulate the Ka°ba. Something strange and fearful appeared to me. I heard a voice and was afraid, then a white bird appeared and stroked my breast. My fear departed from me. I felt no trace of pain, grief, discomfort or fear. I was given a cup of white sherbet. When I drank that sherbet my heart was filled with a splendid radiance. I had attained a blissful happiness. Then I saw a group of girls, tall willowy and extremely beautiful, who were strangers to Mecca. They were not the daughters of °Abd Manāf, although they did resemble them. They surrounded me and as I was thinking to myself, ‘there was no one in the house, where can these beings have come from,’ one of them said to me: ‘I am Eve, wife of the venerable Adam’; another smiled as she said: ‘I am Sarah, the venerable Abraham’s wife’; a third also smiled as she said: ‘I am Mary, mother of the venerable Jesus’; a fourth said affectionately, ‘I am Pharaoh’s wife, Āsiya, who believed in the venerable Moses. The rest are houries of Paradise.’ They said: ‘We have come to offer our respect and praise to the noble Prophet who is about to appear.’ With every moment the noise and commotion became greater and more intense, yet all fear had left me. A white silk curtain was lowered from Heaven to earth. This mighty curtain veiled me from the jinn. Birds came in flocks; their beaks were of green emerald and their wings rubies. They approached me until their beaks and wings touched my breast. It was as if they were kissing me. Then they circled around me. The Exalted One raised the veil from my eyes and showed me the whole universe. I saw the entire world, east and west. They brought three noble banners, planting one of them in the east, one in the west and the third upon the Ka°ba. I saw men in heaven. They moved through space carrying bejeweled bowls and jugs and golden vessels. At that moment, my Muhammad was easily and painlessly born. [Allāh bless

our Master Muhammad and Muhammad's family and companions, and give them peace.] I looked and saw that his eyes were anointed with collyrium, that his umbilical cord was cut and that he was already circumcised. Wrapped in a white shawl, he placed his blessed head to the ground in prostration, raised the index finger of his blessed right hand and offered a prayer of supplication to God, Glorious and Exalted is He.

"When I bent over and listened, I heard him praying to his Lord and Creator, saying with that tiny mouth, 'I testify that there is no god but Allāh and that I am Allāh's Messenger. Allāh is greater by far and praise is due to Allāh in abundance, so Glory be to Allāh, morning and evening. O Allāh, my Community, my Community.' "

In another account, Safīya bint °Abd al-Muttalib says: "When I went into the venerable Āmina's room that night, she had not yet given birth, but a light had appeared. It bathed us and the whole room in radiance. I witnessed six signs: first, he prostrated himself the moment he was born; second, he raised his baby head and said quite clearly: "lā ilāha illā-llāh wa-innī rasūlu-llāh"[4]; third, a magnificent radiance was apparent; fourth, when I intended to wash him, a voice said to me: 'O Safīya, do not trouble yourself; we have already washed him clean; fifth, he was born already circumcised and with his umbilical cord already cut; sixth, when I was going to wrap him up, I saw that he was already wrapped in a silk cloth with a seal on his back. Inscribed on the seal were the words: "Tabahbah yā lahyay Muhammad; anta haysūrun tawajjah haythu shi'ta innaka mansūrun; lā ilāha illā-llāh; Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh."[5]

"When he prostrated himself, I saw his lips moving. I held my ear to his blessed mouth and heard him praying to his lord, 'My Community, my Community.' "

THE NEW-BORN PROPHET PRAYS FOR THIS COMMUNITY

That revered Prophet prayed for us to the Exalted Lord, saying:

“My Community, my Community,” as soon as he was delivered from his mother’s womb. As for us, although we need the intercession of that noble Messenger in this world and the next, we heedlessly neglect his noble example and fail to obey his Sacred Law. Is it fitting for a Muslim neither to hear his name nor to follow his example and the Qur’ān he brought? Ought we not to love him more than anything we possess, more than family, friends, children, husbands or wives? To disobey Muhammad, on him be peace, when, from the moment of his birth, he spread the wing of compassion over all mankind, is an inhuman insult to his religion, his exemplary practice, his community and his people.

There are two parts to the Community: one part is constituted by those of us who have already embraced the faith, while the other consists of those who have yet to be honored with Islam. The Prophet’s plea is for both groups.

Believers, let us save ourselves from heedlessness. By night and day, let us bless and salute our Master, the most noble beloved of Allāh, his children, his wives, his companions, his helpers and his friends. Let us love our Master, the teacher of the universe, more than anything we own. Our success and salvation in both worlds lie in acting in accordance with his Sacred Law, following his Exemplary Practice and walking in his footsteps. May the Glorified and Exalted Lord grant us all the blessing of His assistance, enable us all to practice these things and let us all attain favor in the sight of Ahmad. In honor of the Chief of the Messengers.

The venerable Āmina, mother of our beloved Prophet, relates: “When I had given birth to my son, Muhammad, he immediately prostrated himself and pleaded: ‘O Lord, my community, my community. Meanwhile, a white cloud descended upon me from heaven and sounds like the whinnying of horses came out from inside the cloud. That cloud enveloped my Muhammad and he disappeared from my sight. I heard a voice crying: ‘Take Muhammad, on him be peace, all round the east and the west; take him inside all the oceans and seas, so that all creatures on land and in the seas may hear of his noble coming, learn his form and description and become informed of his mission. He has come to warn and frighten all polytheists, unbelievers and sinners in the whole world and to bring good tidings to the people of faith, sincerity and obedience.’ Thus they proclaimed the glory of the Messenger to all the universe. The cry went out, ‘After his mission, all the polytheists and sinners will bow at the waist, the world will be filled with the Light of Faith, the People of Faith will be glad and the People of Error dismayed.’ A moment later that cloud opened up; I saw my son Muhammad wrapped in a green silk shawl with water dripping from him. Suddenly, I heard a voice saying: ‘Look, look! Muhammad has traveled the whole world from east to west; all the people of the world have become his obedient followers; his religion is triumphant over all others.’

“When I heard these words, I looked at my son, Muhammad. His blessed face was as bright as the full moon and he was fragrant with musk and beautiful perfumes. They had perfumed him with the fragrances of Paradise.

“Three winged beings with lovely faces then appeared. One of them held a golden jug, the second a bowl of green emeralds and the third, a white silk cloth. He opened that silk cloth and took out a ring. The ring dazzled the eyes of all who looked at it. With water of Paradise poured from that golden jug, they washed Muhammad, on him be peace, seven times in that emerald

bowl. With that shining ring they set a seal between his shoulders, then wrapped the noble ring up in the silk. Then, one of those three beings took my son, Muhammad, on him be peace, under his wing, held him for a while and then handed him to me. The angel who held that silk cloth in his hand whispered something in the ear of Muhammad, on him be peace, kissed him between the eyes and said: ‘Blessedness be yours, O Muhammad. You have become dignified and respected in all hearts. Help has been given to you and to your Community; east and west have been laid open to your Community. The keys to the islands in the sea, to the citadels and to the cities have been conferred on your community.’ ”

Ibn °Abbās says: “On that blessed night when our Messenger was born, all the idols in the Ka°ba fell on their faces and were smashed. An unseen voice called out: ‘Perdition and torment to the idolatrous polytheists among the Quraysh. Tonight he has surely come, the venerable and glorious Prophet who is faithful and true to his promise. Al-Lāt, al-°Uzzā and all the other idols have been destroyed, Satan has been imprisoned and Paradise on High has been beautified with every kind of adornment.’ ”

That night the lamps in the Ka°ba lit themselves and the houries and angels in Paradise on High congratulated one another with the good news of the Messenger’s arrival. On earth below, men and jinn and other creatures also congratulated one another and shared the good tidings. The cry went out: “May the exalted One make you ever happy, O Muhammad. The Lord of Majesty has not created any servant more noble than you, no one more excellent than you was ever born. The angels never rejoiced at the birth of any servant as they rejoiced at your birth.” All the seas were in ferment; all the creatures in the seas announced the good news of the Prophet’s birth.

Our Master’s grandfather, the venerable °Abd al-Muttalib, was at the Ka°ba. The venerable Āmina sent him the news that he had a grandson and

invited him to come and see the child. When the venerable °Abd al-Muttalib arrived he explained: “I was at the Ka°ba when its noble walls began to tremble, calling gleefully to one another, ‘The final Prophet who will purge us of idols has honored the world with his birth.’ I was amazed to hear these words coming from the walls of the Ka°ba. I now realize how very great is the glory of this blessed grandson of mine to whom you have given birth.” Looking tenderly at Muhammad he gave thanks and praise to Allāh for granting him a grandson of such exalted worth and high nobility. The beautiful fragrance emanating from our Master’s noble body perfumed the city of Mecca as if it was filled with musk and ambergris. Sounds of good wishes and rejoicing rose to the heavenly throne. Our Master’s uncle, Abū Lahab was woken from his sleep by the loud noises; his house was filled with the scent of musk and ambergris. “What are those sounds?” he asked his slave girl, Thuwayba. “Where do these smells of musk and ambergris come from? Find out and let me know.” Thuwayba went out of doors. When she learned the reason for all the clamor and joyful shouting, she came back to Abū Lahab and said: “Congratulations on your good news, Abū Lahab. Your brother °Abdullāh has a son. These lovely fragrances emanate from the noble body of the newborn child. Those sounds are the cheerful voices of all creatures between heaven and earth.” Delighted to hear this news, Abū Lahab said to his slave girl: “O Thuwayba, you have given me good tidings and I give you your freedom.” Thuwayba was a wet nurse, so Abū Lahab gave her the command: Go to my nephew and give him your breast.”

For seven days the Messenger of Allāh was suckled by his mother, the venerable Āmina. After those seven days, and until the venerable Halīma took over, it was the lady Thuwayba, Abū Lahab’s slave girl, who suckled our Master.

Abū Lahab’s Condition in the Other World

It is related that after Abū Lahab had died, our Master saw him in a dream. He asked this uncle of his, who had never believed in him, what his situation was like in the Hereafter. Abū Lahab replied: “Although I was the uncle of such a noble and glorious Prophet, I did not believe in him. So much the worse for me! Instead of believing, acquiring honor in the lower world and dignity in the Hereafter, and enjoying the bounties of Paradise, I became his greatest enemy and so was disgraced in the world below and abased in the Hereafter. I remained in disbelief and error and so fit for the Fire. However, on account of two kindness I did the august Prophet on the night of his birth, my condition is somewhat different from that of the other inhabitants of Hell.

“My first privilege is this: when the eve of Monday comes round, my torment is alleviated—lightened—until the eve of Tuesday. As for the second: through the whole of Monday, night and day, I stick my thumb and middle finger in my mouth and suck. A cold liquid comes out between them. I cool myself by drinking that liquid, something denied to the other inmates of the Fire. Should you ask why I enjoy this favor, the explanation is this: Muhammad, on him be peace, was born on a Monday eve. When my slave girl, Thuwayba, brought me the news, I was so pleased to hear of the Messenger’s birth that I freed the girl from bondage. That is why my torment is eased on that night of the week. Because I also told her to go and suckle the child, I now have the pleasure of drinking the cold juice that comes out of my fingers.”

MIRACULOUS EVENTS ATTENDING THE BLESSED PROPHET’S BIRTH

Not only the idols in the Ka°ba but all the idols in the world fell on their faces and were broken on the eve of our Master’s birth. On that night the fires of the Magians were totally extinguished for the first time in a

thousand years, leaving not a trace of heat. Lake Sava disappeared into the earth leaving not a trace of water behind. It seemed as though a sudden heat wave had made it all evaporate. Nothing but dust arose when people walked across it. Fourteen of the twenty-two battlements of Chosroes' palace collapsed. The throne of Anūshirwān, the Persian emperor, also collapsed that night. A terrible fear possessed him and when morning came, he assembled all his astrologers, diviners and soothsayers. "I had a terrible dream last night, " he said, "Interpret it for me. " When the soothsayers asked him about what he had seen, Anūshirwān replied, "I shall not tell you what it was I saw. You must tell me, otherwise I shall not believe your interpretation." They told him that this was beyond their power and said: "There is a diviner in Bahrayn, by the name of Rabīr ibn Rabī°a; ask him." Anūshirwān then sent one of his men, called °Abd al-Masīh, to this diviner, who had not a single bone in his body. They called him " Flat Man" because he always lay on a board. He could not sit up, having no bones at all apart from his skull. He was very old. That Flat Man was a scholar who had studied all the heavenly scriptures. He was also an expert in the science of divination.

Once each year they would put him upon a sheet of gold and take him out to hear him give his predictions for the coming year. They would write down his prophecies and commit them to memory.

The "Flat Man" Interprets the Emperor's Dream

Anūshirwān's servant, °Abd al-Masīh, happened to reach Bahrayn on the very day when the Flat Man was due to come out of his cell. His very first utterance was an interpretation of King Chosroes' dream. Although °Abd al-Masīh had not even spoken to him, he related Chosroes' dream and interpreted it.

He described the fourteen battlements of Chosroes' palace and the drying up of Lake Sava, as well as the extinguishing of the pyrolaters' fire. He announced that Anūshirwān, emperor of the Medes and Persians, had dreamt a terrible dream in which Arab horses and dromedaries had come and filled the city of Medā'in, driving out his own camels. He interpreted this dream as follows: "A Prophet has been born in the city of Mecca. His name is Muhammad [Allāh bless him and give him peace]. He is the most noble descendant of the venerable Abraham, and the last of the Prophets. That most holy being is a Messenger whose pure character and noble qualities and attributes are praised and extolled in the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms and all the other heavenly scriptures. From this day on, all the divination of the diviners in the world has been rendered void, for Satan has been denied access to heaven. The king of esoteric knowledge has arrived. As for the interpretation of Anūshirwān's dream, the Arab horse and the Arabs mounted on dromedaries are the companions of this newborn Messenger. These men are destined to conquer that city and country, driving out the people of Anūshirwān. Such is the meaning of the dream.

"As for the collapse of fourteen of the battlements of Chosroes' palace, leaving eight intact, this is a sign that eight emperors will follow Anūshirwān before that country is conquered by the Arabs. What is indicated by the extinguishing of the pyrolaters' fires and the drying up of Lake Sava is that many of the Magians, Jews and Christians will attain right guidance through the final Prophet, while those who do not will be scattered in disarray. It is indicated that when that glorious Messenger comes, he will illumine the whole world with the Light of Faith."

Having uttered these words, the Flat Man spent a long time weeping. "Little remains of my life," he said. "Flat Man will not survive to announce the mission of that glorious Prophet. That is the reason for my tears."

Anūshirwān's servant, °Abd al-Masīh, noted down and memorized everything he heard Flat Man say, then came and reported to his Master. Anūshirwān was pleased with the news; eight rulers would succeed him; eight reigns he reckoned, would cover a hundred and fifty or two hundred years. However, it did not turn out that way. The eight rulers came and went in a short space of time, the venerable Caliph °Umar, may Allāh be pleased with him, wiped the Persian Kingdom from the map of the world and the Sāsānid dynasty became extinct.

The companions of Allāh's Messenger occupied Medā'in, driving out the fire-worshippers. Iran was ennobled with Islam.

Many signs and portents marked the noble birth of Allāh's Messenger, Allāh bless him and give him peace. Hundreds of books would be needed to record all the marvels associated with our Master from his origin as Primal Light until the time when his venerable mother, Āmina, brought him physically to birth.

COMMEMORATION OF THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY

The twelfth night of Rabī°u-l'Awwal marks the anniversary of our Prophet's birth. That night is called Laylat al-Mawlūd. It is an Islamic duty to observe that most blessed night with due reverence, honor and respect. Those who devote this night to worship will obtain the same reward as for so observing the Night of Power. This night ranks higher than the Night of Power for if the glorious Prophet had not come, the Holy Qur'ān would not have been sent down. The Noble Qur'ān itself mentions that its revelation began on the Night of Power. The Glorious Qur'ān tells us that vigil on the

Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Because of the connection between our Master's birth and the revelation of the Qur'ān, the night of the Prophet's birthday is at least equal to the Night of Power and may even be superior to it. In spite of this, many Muslims neglect to observe the night of our Prophet's birthday. In fact, those who love the Messenger of Allāh more than all they possess, more than life itself, and who seek to perfect their faith are under a personal obligation to revere and respect the month and the night when our Prophet was born.

The sincere companions once asked our Master, "O Messenger of Allāh, since when have you been a Prophet?" Our Master replied: "I was a Prophet when Adam was still between earth and water." Tradition tells us that Allāh created the soul of Muhammad as the archetype of all souls. He then commanded him to prostration for a hundred years. The Lord then divided the Light of Muhammad into ten parts.

Out of the first part, He created the Throne; from the second, the Pedestal; from the third, the Tablet; from the fourth, the Sun; from the fifth, the Moon, from the sixth, the Stars; from the seventh, the Angels, from the eighth, the Light of the Believer; from the ninth, Paradise and from the tenth, Adam. The Light of Muhammad was set in the forehead of Adam, from where it passed in succession to Seth, to Idrīs and eventually to the venerable °Abdullāh, from whom it reached the venerable Āmina, and finally made its appearance in the noble Ahmad, to flood this dark world with light. It is the placing of this light in the body of Adam, and its manifestation in the body of the Chosen Prophet, that we celebrate on the twelfth night of the month of Rabī °u-l'Awwal.

As it saw the arising of the Messenger, this night can see the manifestation of the Light of Ahmad in you also. This is the night of coming to birth, the night of manifestation. On this night the whole universe is plunged in light.

All the denizens of heaven and earth are immersed in joy and gladness. On this night, life comes to the lifeless. On this night, the king comes to the heart. On this night, the king of the Prophets, sovereign of the Throne of "For me, together with Allāh," the moon of the Two Bow Lengths, the luminary of both worlds, the sun of reality, the Sultan of esoteric knowledge fills the world with light. For those who appreciate its value, this night is Power; this night is the remedy for sufferings; this night is life for the lover.

It is particularly appropriate on this night to venerate and show affection for the noble descendants of the Messenger of Allāh. If we hope for the grandfather's intercession, it behooves us to show love and respect and reverence for the grandchild. On this night in particular we should also pay our respects to the scholars, for 'the scholars are the heirs of the Prophets.'[6] Knowledge is an attribute of Allāh, and the value of learned men is very great. The sleep of scholars is better than the worship of the ignorant. If a scholar not only studies but also puts his knowledge into practice, he will come under the banner of the Messenger of Allāh on the Day of Resurrection and will be granted intercession.

Affection and reverence for the learned should be shown by inviting them to celebrations or by visiting them at home and wishing them a blessed night of the Prophet's birthday. On any day of this month, but especially on the night when our Master was born, we should make a point of being kind to students, the weak, the poor, widows and orphans. We should invite our relatives, friends and neighbors. We should provide hospitality and arrange for recitations of the Qur'ān and noble Birthday hymns ... In short, it behooves every believer to do his utmost to celebrate this night by performing all manner of good works with reverent intention. To those who call themselves Muslims, but make no sacrifice in the cause of Allāh and His Messenger, the Noble Qur'ān makes this reply:

True believers are only those who have faith in Allāh and His Messenger and have left doubt behind, and who strive hard in Allāh's cause with their possessions and their lives. They are the ones who are sincere. [49:15]

How °Abdullāh the Egyptian Commemorated the Prophet's Birth

Muhammad ibn Hātim relates:

"There once lived in Egypt a man called °Abdullāh, a true servant of Allāh. Each year, in the month of Rabī°u-l'Awwal, the Prophet's birthday month, this noble individual would demonstrate his great respect and affection for our Master the Messenger by arranging a great banquet, to which he invited all the notables, the prominent scholars and Qur'ān-reciters, as well as the poor people, the weak, the needy and the orphans. He welcomed everybody to these feasts, including the non-Muslims. He even fed the leftovers to cats, dogs and other stray animals. He brought in preachers to preach, reciters to recite the Qur'ān and singers to chant various odes and eulogies. He graciously enabled all his guests to celebrate in honor of the Messenger and Prophet.

"His non-Muslim neighbors saw him giving these feasts each year. When the month of the Prophet's birthday came around again, and everyone was enjoying the usual celebrations, his neighbor's wife asked her husband: 'This neighbor of ours always invites all those people on this night of the year. What a lot of money he must spend on these huge banquets. What is the point of it all? What is the purpose of a man like that? A normal person does not go to such expense even for a wedding banquet, held once in a lifetime. What kind of man is this, to make such an outlay every year?'

“Her husband answered: The reason he gives those banquets is to show his respect for the month in which their Prophet Muhammad was born, and his affection for the night of his birth. He is celebrating out of joy and gratitude for having lived to see that night come around again. That night, the lady had a dream. In her dream,

°Abdullāh’s banquet was attended by an extremely handsome and imposing figure, his face more radiant than the sun, along with a numerous company with faces bright like the morning star. °Abdullāh’s house was immersed in light. Amazed at this person’s beauty, the lady asked one of his companions who this noble being might be. ‘Never did I behold such beauty. He seems a most saintly individual, so charming, refined, smiling and sweet-spoken. Pray tell me who he is.’ To this she received the reply.

“This noble being is the venerable Muhammad, the Messenger of Allāh, the chief of the sons of Adam, the glory of mankind, the pride of the universe and a mercy to the whole world. ‘And why has he honored this place with his presence?’ she asked. The owner of this house is a lover of the Messenger of Allāh’, replied that companion. He demonstrates his love and affection every year in this month. It is because our Master is pleased with his affection that he attends °Abdullāh’s banquet.

“The lady then asked the companion: ‘If I wait, will he speak with me when he comes out? Will he give me a reply?’ ‘No need to wait,’ said he. ‘Go in to where he is sitting. Ask whatever you wish. No one is prevented from reaching his presence. He always answers those who ask. He leaves no one sad and disappointed.’ The lady entered the room where the Messenger was. As she came into the presence of the Most Noble Messenger, she saw that our Master was immersed in light. There he sat with his distinguished Companions standing round him. The lady addressed the Messenger, saying: ‘O Muhammad!’

“Our Master responded with: ‘At your service!’

“ ‘You are a Prophet,’ said she, ‘while I am not even of your religion. And yet you answered me with: ‘At your service.’

“ ‘When I saw your face,’ the Prophet told her, ‘I said: “At your service,” because I knew that the Lord of Majesty, would grant you the guidance of Islam and honor you with the light of faith.’

“ ‘You are the Noble Prophet, most majestic by nature. What then is the mysterious reason for your deigning to honor this house?’

“ ‘For love of me, the owner of this house invites so many of my children, the scholars, the Qur’ān reciters, the poor, the orphans, the needy and the righteous of my Community. Because of his affection for me, he gives all these banquets, spending so much money and wealth. By leave of the Glorious and Exalted Lord, I came to visit him in his home and to attend his feast. In honor of my visit, may the All-Glorious and Exalted Lord preserve all within this house from every accident and misfortune, calamity and disaster, throughout the coming year; may He grant them His mercy and all kinds of blessings, keeping them ever in safety and good health!’

“The lady then cried: ‘I have accepted the true religion, the religion of Islam.’ She became a Muslim as she said the words: I testify that there is no god but Allāh and I testify that you are the Messenger of Allāh.’ She went on to say: O Messenger of Allāh, if I devote my wealth and my life to your

cause, will you also honor my house?' 'Yes,' replied our Master, 'if you display the same affection for me as this person does, I shall come to your home also.' A person is together with the one he loves.

"That lady woke up just as she was saying: 'Let me spend all I can each year in the Prophet's birthday month; for the sake of Allāh, and for the love of Muhammad, let me devote all my wealth to celebrating his noble birthday, having sermons preached and praises of the Messenger recited, entertaining the scholars, Qur'ān-memorizers, students, poor and needy folk, the weak, the orphans and the widows.' She saw that she, her house and her heart were filled with the light of faith and blessed with divine guidance. 'As soon as my husband has gone out in the morning,' she said to herself, "I must go to the mufti and declare my faith and my Islam. Since my husband is not a Muslim, I shall be automatically divorced. I shall spend all the money I have left, and all of my goods, on arranging a banquet. I shall have the noble Birthday Hymn recited and joyfully declare my allegiance to that Most Noble Messenger.' As she was thinking these thoughts, her husband said to her:

"Wife, let us slaughter all the chicken and lambs we can find. Order whatever you wish. I'll go and buy it. Let us prepare a banquet. Let us lay the tables as our neighbor does.' Taken by surprise, his wife asked: 'What banquets are you giving?' Her husband then told her: 'I saw the same dream you saw. I have also accepted the religion of Islam. I have also been honored with the light of faith. The Messenger of Allāh gave me the command: "You have no wealth of your own. You must serve at your wife's feast. By that service you may attain the honor you desire." ' His wife was delighted to hear this. The couple declared their faith in the presence of the mufti.

A EULOGY

May the All-Glorious and Exalted Lord increase in our hearts, till the end of our days, the high esteem and affection we hold for our Master, the Most Noble Messenger.

The most famous of our Master’s noble names are MUHAMMAD MUSTAFĀ, Allāh bless him and give him peace. His other noble names include al-Muzzammil, al-Muddaththir, Ahmad, Mahmūd, al-Bashīr, al-Nadhīr, al-Sirāj al-Munīr, Nabīyu-r-Rahma and Shafī°u-l’Umma. Whenever we mention or write any of these names, we should say or write: sallā-llāhu°alayhi wa-sallam [“Allāh bless him and give him peace”].

Some of the most famous leaders have made themselves loved and respected in their own time. Since their death, however, they have belonged to the past and are remembered only when we read the history books; but only Allāh knows how many lovers spend sleepless nights for love of our Master. There are now, as there will be till the Resurrection, millions of Muslims ready to sacrifice their lives and possessions for the sake of his religion. It is as sovereign of these hearts that he holds dominion. This is a mark of his Prophethood. He was already forty years old when, by divine command, he committed himself to calling the polytheists to accept Islam, the religion of Allāh.

All mankind was enmeshed in tyranny, unbelief, polytheism, and barbarity. Hearts were devoid of the fear of Allāh, of mercy and compassion. We have further proof of his Prophethood in the fact that in so short a time, he succeeded in making such brutalized unbelievers into models of humanity. To obey him is to obey Allāh and to disobey him is surely to disobey Allāh. Allegiance to our Master is surely allegiance to Allāh. Affection for him is affection for Allāh. Hostility to our Master is hostility to Allāh.

Our Master teaches and commands us, saying; “Unless you love one another, you cannot have faith.” Those without faith cannot enter Paradise. He tells us that our faith is not complete unless we love him more than anything we possess, and calls us to mutual affection, love and respect, to the perfection of our faith. Our venerable Master, the leader of the faithful, and final Prophet, Allāh bless him and give him peace, is the son of Abdullāh ibn Abd al-Muttalib, of the clan of Hāshim, part of the Quraysh, the noblest of all the Arab tribes. His mother is the venerable Āmina bint Wahb. This light incarnate has a thousand names similar to the divine Names. Over four hundred of his names and noble attributes are recorded in the Qur’ān, the rest in the other heavenly scriptures: the Gospel, the Torah, the Psalms and the other scrolls.

Fortunate are we that Allāh has made us servants to Him and a Community to His beloved. He has gladdened us with His pardon. All praise belongs to Allāh. O Lord, protect us against the lure of Satan and the evil of our lower selves. Enlighten our minds, safeguard our intellects and grant us the capacity for doing good. Let us share in this night’s abundant grace. In honor of this night when Your beloved was born, deliver us from Your fire and admit us into Your light. May the sun of the two worlds be pleased and content with us. Let us all attain his favorable regard.

O Lord! O Living! O Self-Subsisting! O All-Capable! O All-Generous! O All-Giving! O All-Opening! O Most High! O Magnificent! O Subtle One! My Lord, inform Your Messenger of our condition. My Lord, in honor of this night, let all our dead enjoy the bounties of Paradise. My Lord, let our end and outcome be good.

Amen, in honor of the Chief of the Messengers and their families; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all Worlds. My Lord, deliver from Your Fire those who pray for our welfare, and bring them into Your Light!

NOTES

[1]yā muzzammilu

[2]yā muddaththiru

[3]sanatu-lfitahl

[4]“There is no god but Allāh and I am Allāh’s Messenger.”

[5]“Open wide, jaws of Muhammad; you are a lion, turn whichever way you will, you are victorious; there is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.”

[6]al-°ulamā’u warathatu-l’anbiyā’

THE TWENTY-FIRST DISCOURSE

The Heavenly Ascension

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

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Glorified is He, who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing [17:1].

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DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE

Immeasurable is the Divine Majesty of the Lord of Power, the Everlasting Creator who does whatever He wills and causes whatever He wishes to be done; who takes whatever He wills from whomever He wills; who exalts whomever He wishes and abases whomever He wishes; who brings the dead to life and causes the living to die. Not only is such measurement beyond the capacity of the mind and comprehension given to us, we cannot even realize what bounties we have received. This is quite beyond our scope. He has conveyed some knowledge of His divine power and sublime majesty to His Prophets, and to the saints and scholars who are their heirs, and they have explained it to us within the limits of our understanding.

Each of us has been given a mind, with some ability to think and understand what has been manifested to us; but our mental faculties are incapable of total comprehension. In particular, our minds are powerless to grasp the Divine Omnipotence, to which they can only acquiesce submissively.

How could we presume to measure the Power of Allāh with a mind incapable of knowing what will happen tomorrow, or even a minute from

now? If we showed human sperm to a person ignorant of the facts of life, saying: “Look, this is what we are created from,” his mind would reject the idea, just as it would reject the idea of resurrection after death.

An unbeliever called Ubayy ibn Khalaf, thinking himself very clever, once crumbled some decayed bones in his hand. Blowing the dust into the blessed face of Muhammad, on him to be peace, he impudently asked: “Will these be brought back to life?” “Yes,” said our Master, the noble Messenger: “Allāh has the power to restore them to life, and He will do so. You and me also, He will bring back to life; you will receive the punishment for your denial, while I receive the reward for my faith.” Allāh revealed the following Verses of the Qur’ān to counter this unbeliever’s denial, as instruction for the believers and to caution the infidels who apply their own false reasoning to the measurement of the Divine Power. Thus He congratulates the Party of Salvation on their faith, throwing the disbelief and envy of the Party of Error in their own faces:

Does not man see that it is We who created him from a drop of sperm? And yet he is an open disputer. He strikes up arguments about Us, and forgets how he was created. He says: ‘Who could give life to bones when they are rotten?’ Say: ‘He shall give them life, who created them the first time, for He is well-versed in every kind of creation. The One who produces fire for you from the green tree, which you kindle. Is not He, who created the heavens and the earth, able to create the likes of them? Yes, indeed, for He is the Creator Supreme, the All-Knowing. His command, when He wills a thing, is to say to it: ‘Be,’ and it is. [36:77-82]

LIMITATIONS OF THE HUMAN MIND

The mind is very necessary. Indeed divine obligations apply only to people with minds, but this does not mean that we are capable of measuring everything with our own intellects. To make the situation beautifully clear, let us imagine a man who does not know where walnuts spring from, nor where the pumpkin grows. Suppose we take a walnut and a pumpkin, asking him which comes from a tree and which grows on the ground. When he sees the huge trunk of the walnut tree, he will surely tell us that the pumpkin comes from there and that the walnut grows from the pumpkin roots.

We have been given a mind with the ability to think and comprehend but it is impossible for us to escape from error or distinguish between good and evil unless we see things in the light of the Qur'ān and obey the Prophet, on him be peace, to whom Allāh has given His help and guidance. Without that divine help and guidance, our mind, thought and comprehension can apply only human standards of measurement, leading us to the pitiful condition of attributing our own impotence to Allāh, supposing Him to be incapable of things which actually cause Him no difficulty at all.

On the morning when our Master, the noble Messenger, returned from his Ascension, he went out to the Sacred Mosque, where he astonished the tribesmen of Quraysh by telling them that he had spent part of the night visiting the Heavens, the Aqsā Mosque, Paradise and Hell, the Throne and the Pedestal, and that he had held ninety thousand conversations with the Lord of all the Worlds. Some of them looked at one another, saying: "How could this be?" Another set of people found this very much to their liking, for they realized that these to their minds impossible reports, would put off many of those who were hesitating on the brink of faith. In fact, these very people did turn away from Islam and faith and reverted to unbelief, saying: "Such things are impossible!" If our Master had told the people of Quraysh that the Ascension had happened to him in a dream, they would hardly refuse to accept it as such. They could not have said: "You are incapable of having a dream like that." Any of us can wander the heavens in a dream.

We can touch the stars and do many other incredible things while dreaming and nobody will tell us that such visions are impossible.

Although no one would or could have objected if our Master had told them his Ascension was a dream, when they heard it reported as a fact, even some of those who had become believers and Muslims rejected it. They abandoned their faith when our Master declared that, in a moment of time, he had traveled from Mecca to Jerusalem and from there up to Heaven, returning to find his bed still warm, after he had been shown Paradise, Hell and world of the Hereafter, and everything that was to be until the Resurrection. Quite clearly, what they refused to accept was our Master's statement that he had made this journey both in the spirit and in the flesh ...

Whoever obeys the Messenger, thereby obeys Allāh. [4:80]

They neither believed nor obeyed the Prophet's noble words, but preferred to advance their own false notions. Do not try to measure the Divine Power with your own inadequate scales, for that is what Abū Jahl did. When he heard the report of the Prophet's Ascension, he said: "O Muhammad, this can only be something you dreamt." When our master replied: "No, I traveled bodily." Abū Jahl asked him to stand up. Then he said: "Now lift one foot off the ground." When the Messenger, on him be peace, had done this, Abū Jahl said: " Now lift your other foot as well." The unbeliever, who was impudently daring to measure the power of God by the standard of his own feeble intellect, was happy to receive the answer he expected: " I shall fall, Abū Jahl." "Well," said Abū Jahl, "since you cannot lift both feet off the ground and stand even a few inches above the earth, how could you travel from here to Jerusalem and ascend from there into the heavens?" Our Master calmly relied: "O Abū Jahl, I did not go by myself; my Lord transported me."

As soon as the Arab polytheists heard these words of the Messenger, on him be peace, they said: “In that case, describe what the Aqsā Mosque was like.” Some of them had even been there. They thought Muhammad, on him be peace, would not be able to describe it accurately.

W hen the polytheists made this request, the Lord at once presented the form of the Aqsā Mosque before the eyes of the glorious Messenger. Our Master looked at it and began to give a detailed description of the temple in Jerusalem.

The unbelievers could find no fault with the description he gave, but they continued in their obstinacy, saying: “Yes, you have described the Aqsā Mosque. Now, let us see if you can tell us about our caravan which is on the way here. That’s more important to us. After all, you could just be repeating a description of the Aqsā Mosque you had heard from others. Our Caravan is traveling the way you claim to have gone and come back by. If you are a Prophet, tell us about this caravan of ours.” The fact that our Master had not gone to Jerusalem previously was proof of his Ascension. Nevertheless, he also told them about their caravan. “Yes,” he said, “I did encounter such a caravan. It was at a place called Rawha. They had lost one of their camels and were looking for it. There was water on top of their luggage and I took a drink from it, then put it back in its container.” The unbelievers were astonished. “This is another proof, let us enquire about it,” they said.

Next, they wanted to know how many camels and how many people there were in the caravan. This time, by leave of the Exalted One, the caravan was incarnated before the very eyes of the most Noble Messenger. Our Master counted the people and camels in it, adding: “There is a white camel in front, laden with two sacks containing certain articles. I noticed that the

other camels were carrying such and such and such and such in their loads. They will enter Mecca at sunrise on such and such a day." "This is further proof; we must check it out," said the unbelievers.

On the day when our Master had said the caravan would arrive, they assembled at the place called Sanīya and waited there, saying: "As soon as the sun rises, we will know him for a liar." But just as one of the unbelievers, who had gone out to meet the caravan, yelled out: "The sun is rising," another cried, "Here comes the caravan!"

At the head of the caravan, as our Master had said, there appeared a white camel loaded with two sacks. All the people and goods in the caravan corresponded exactly to the description given by the Messenger, on him be peace, but even when they saw this and accepted the facts, they still could not believe. Although they had verified the truth of everything he had said, they declared: "This is plain sorcery; Muhammad is a sorcerer."

They could not accept that the miracles they had seen were from the might and power of Allāh. They remained in disbelief and error, stubbornly denying that Allāh was the Creator of these marvels miraculously performed by the venerable Muhammad, His most noble beloved. Allāh is the Creator of miracles. Is He not Capable of doing these things? Is it not possible for him to take a servant of his from Mecca to Jerusalem and thence up into the heavens?

After this story had gone around, Abū Jahl noticed that many people were renouncing their faith. He came running to the house of Abū Bakr, the Veracious, and said: "O son of Qahāfa, have you heard the news? What is your friend Muhammad saying? He claims to have gone last night in a

moment of time from Mecca to Jerusalem and thence up to Heaven. He is giving incredibly strange and weird reports. Do you believe his words?"

Without hesitation, the venerable Abū Bakr said: "Did you hear these things from the man himself? Did Muhammad, on him be peace, clearly say them?" Arrogantly sure of his own intelligence, the unbeliever replied: "It would never cross my mind to invent such things. Of course Muhammad, the Trustworthy, is saying them." Then the venerable Abū Bakr said: "In that case I certainly do believe him. I believe every word he said, every sentence, every letter, so completely that I feel not one atom of doubt or hesitation in my heart, for he absolutely never tells a lie." Thus did the venerable Abū Bakr, the Veracious, prove his veracity, his faith and belief in God's Messenger. This is why the noble Lord of All Worlds conferred upon him the title of "Veracious" and proclaimed his veracity in the Clear Qur'ān until the Day of Resurrection.[1]

Both men were doubtless intelligent. For Abū Jahl, reasoning within his own mental framework, it was only normal to dismiss such happenings as impossible. His mind was not adequate for the task of comprehending the divine Omnipotence.

As for the venerable Abū Bakr, he proved his intelligence by the excellence with which he accomplished the duties of the Caliphate after the death of the Prophet, on him be peace. He was aware, however, that he owed to Allāh whatever knowledge of the divine power he had received through his study of the Qur'ān and the "light of submission to God" taught by God's Messenger, Muhammad, on him be peace.

A person who has been given intelligence, but not divine help and guidance, may take a rocket and go looking for Allāh in space only to come

back, saying: “I saw nothing of the sort up there,” and so denying the very power of Allāh that enabled him to reach the heavens.

Although such people are surrounded by God on every side, they are not and cannot be aware of Him. They are just like the fishes, which know nothing of the water that completely surrounds them. If the little fish should say to a big fish: “They say the ocean exists; suppose you show us,” the big fish might reply: “Let us find a place outside the ocean, from which I will be able to show you.” For the fish, the sea is life. Just as a fish could not survive if it tried to see the ocean by getting outside it, so there is nowhere outside of God for us to go and look for Him. The power of Allāh is All-Encompassing. While the heedless go looking for Him in the sky, the wise know that He is nearer to them than their own selves. They believe that God sees them even if they do not see Him, and therefore live righteous lives.

As for those whose minds enjoy divine help and guidance, they acknowledge God’s power and majesty even if they do not travel physically into space. Even if they cannot completely grasp and comprehend the extent of His power and majesty from the existence of every atom in the universe, thanks to this divinely aided and guided intelligence they have been given, they achieve peace of mind and spirit.

ENVY & FOLLY

Envy is the chief reason why people like Abū Jahl and Ubayy ibn Khalaf fall into such a miserable situation. For there are two groups that do not accept the Messenger and the Qur’ān. The first are the envious, while the second are the fools.

The Blessed Jesus Flees From a Fool

A person once encountered the venerable Jesus, who was going somewhere in a great hurry. “O Spirit of Allāh,” said the man, “where are you rushing off to at such great speed?” Replied the venerable Jesus: “I am fleeing from the fool.” The man then asked: “O Prophet of Allāh, you have restored the dead to life by God’s leave; you have given sight to the blind; you have healed the leper. Have you no remedy for the fool?” But the venerable Prophet told him: “The dead may be brought to life, the blind may be given the power of sight, the leper may be healed. But for the fool, since he is subject to Allāh’s wrath, there is no cure. From him one must flee.”

Although Abū Jahl and others like him were intelligent, they had not been granted divine help and guidance and, because of their envy, they refused to follow the Messenger and denied the miracles they were shown. Far from having faith, they added daily to their disbelief and tyranny, rushing headlong into Hell. Such is the nature of envy that those who are inflamed by it cease to know what they are doing and suffer frustration in this world and the Hereafter. Not only do they lose peace of mind and fall into the fire of Hell even in this life, but in the Hereafter also they tumble into Hell.

As for the fool, he does not understand what he is saying, compares the divine power to his own and refuses to believe that Allāh can do anything he cannot do. The All-Glorious One has explained in His Book that fools are like animals, while envious unbelievers are lower than the beasts.

They are like cattle; no, they are further astray [7:179].

The chief of the envious is Satan, the accursed. Because of his envy of the venerable Adam, he was banished from the divine mercy; because of his envy he lost his reason and became incapable of considering why he had been created and whose command he was opposing.

Having become unreasonable, he also became proud. Envy deprived him of his reason and made him arrogant. Forgetting his own nothingness in the face of Allāh, he said: “I prostrate myself before Your Essence, but I shall not prostrate myself before this Adam whom You have created out of dust!” Blinded by envy, he did not realize who it was that he was disobeying. He was impermanent, but he was opposing the Everlasting. He was a servant setting himself against the King. A great warning sign was being established here. Satan could not imagine that the way to Allāh passed through Adam. By refusing to prostrate himself to the venerable Adam, he was denying the Gate of Prophecy. Thus he became the leader of those who say. “I believe in Allāh, but I do not acknowledge the Messengers.” Allāh rejects the faith of those who believe in Him but not in His Messengers. That in why in His Noble Book, He issues the Glorious Command:

Say: ‘If you love Allāh, then follow me; Allāh will love you and for give you your sins. Allāh is Oft-Forgiving, Compassionate.’ [3:31]

We also read in the Noble Book, which is goodness for the spirit, healing for the soul and polish for the heart:

Whoever obeys the Messenger, thereby obeys Allāh. [4:80]

It is easy to know Allāh but difficult to know the Messenger. It is easy to believe in Allāh but hard to believe in the Prophet. Those who acknowledge Allāh but deny the Messenger have become devils. It is inconceivable that anyone should not believe in Allāh and yet believe in the Prophet, for anyone who believes in the Prophet will certainly believe in Allāh. As for those who recognize neither Allāh nor the Messenger, it is generally known and accepted that they are even more bankrupt than the devil, for even the devil not only believes in Allāh but also worships Him.

Of all our Master's enemies, Abū Jahl was the most ferocious. It was he who had given the nickname "Muhammad the Trustworthy," but that was before the Glory of the Universe announced his Prophethood. From that time on, his envy made him excessively cruel and unjust toward our Master. Envy robbed him of all reason, of all capacity for thought and understanding. Blow as he might, he could not extinguish the light of Islam, which had begun to shine and would shine on till the Resurrection. Abū Jahl destroyed himself in the futile effort to blow out the light, which shone all the brighter. The same fate awaits all who act like Abū Jahl.

What Allāh willed and commanded has come to pass. The promise of the Messenger, not that of Satan, has been fulfilled. The promise and threat of Allāh, not those of Abū Jahl, are right and true.

Just as Allāh has caused His servant Muhammad, on him be peace, and the believers to obtain His promised benefits in this world, so will He guarantee them Paradise and its bounties in the Hereafter. Just as He carried out His threat to destroy Abū Jahl, Ubayy ibn Khalaf, Pharaoh, Nimrod and the unbelievers who are their heirs, so on the coming Day of Resurrection will He cast them into the fire of Hell of which He warned them.

Allāh will not break His promise [3:9].

O Lord, we are believers who acknowledge You with our tongues and confirm You in our hearts. Grant us the bounties You have promised, in this world and the Hereafter! Do not disappoint us! Amen. In honor of the Chief of the Messengers ...

O faithful believers in the existence and oneness of Allāh, and in His beloved Muhammad Mustafā! The venerable Adam came and went; he drank the wine of death and left this world. Then came Noah, on him be peace, and the Flood. Noah left this transitory world. For Abraham, the friend of Allāh, Nimrod's fiery furnace turned to light. Nimrod was burned by the fire of his own envy. He boasted that he was "God of the Earth", yet he met a tragic end, destroyed by a mosquito, the puniest of Allāh's creatures. Such is and ever shall be the fate of those who become enemies of Allāh. Only the heedless could never see these things. Although such ingrates have eyes, the veil of heedlessness prevents them from seeing. Abū Jahl looked, but could not see; he heard, but could not understand. All such enemies of Allāh come face to face with disaster and misfortune in some shape or form. Foolish unbelievers do not get the message. They imagine the fate of others cannot happen to them ...

"How Do You Know I Am a Fool? ... "

A man once made this bequest to his son: "Take these hundred gold pieces, my son. You are to give them to the biggest fool you meet." The man died, and the son set out to discharge his father's bequest. Whenever he saw somebody acting stupidly he would approach him to check whether he had found a fool.

In the course of his search, he came one day to a palace, in front of which a crowd had gathered. A bystander explained to him: “The Grand Vizier has displeased the Emperor. The executioner is going to behead him now, then the new Grand Vizier will be made to step over the dead body of his predecessor before being installed in his office.” When asked the reason for this, he added: “As an admonition to the incoming minister.”

A moment later, they brought out a man in handcuffs. Ignoring his moans and groans they forced him to his knees and cut off his head as he pleaded in vain to be spared. The new minister witnessed this scene, then trod on the corpse of his executed predecessor as he mounted the Grand Vizier’s throne of office. Everyone started congratulating the new minister. The young man mingled with the well-wishers. When he came in front of the Grand Vizier, he handed him the purse containing the gold pieces. “What is your motive in giving me this money?” “Please take it,” said the youth. “It is a bequest of my late father’s. Allow me to discharge my duty.” The minister then asked: “Do you mean to tell me that your father’s bequest was to give a hundred gold pieces to the Grand Vizier?” “No,” replied the young man, “Not to the Grand Vizier or minister. My father’s bequest was to give the money to a fool. I have searched high and low, but—forgive my saying so—I have not come across a greater fool than you. By giving you the money I have truly fulfilled my father’s bequest.”

“How do you know I am a fool?” the minister asked, angrily. The young man explained: “I witnessed this ceremony with my own eyes. Your predecessor was beheaded just a short time ago, and you stepped over his body to mount this throne of office. The very same calamity could well befall you tomorrow. One who saw this, yet took no warning from it, is not just any old fool; he is the The Fool himself. Praise be to Allāh, the bequest is fulfilled.” With these words, he turned and went his way.

ARROGANCE

Whatever you do, you will certainly see it again later. The good or evil you do does not bear fruit immediately, just as we cannot sow a seed in the garden and pick the fruit or flower at once. But after a while you will surely see the fruit. If you have done wrong, repent at once and perform good works! Destroy the seed of evil you have sown, killing it with repentance and good works so that it will not arise before you in the future! As for the goodness you have sown as a seed in the field of the spirit, do not kill it and prevent it bearing fruit by taunting those you have favored!

Forgetting that they were impotent, mortal creatures, the Nimrods, Pharaohs and suchlike unbelieving tyrants claimed divine status for themselves; they inflicted every cruelty imaginable upon the Prophets and believers. But what became of them in the end? Where are they now, these bloodthirsty men who did not stop short of infanticide, parricide and fratricide in their lust for power? ...

History records them with a curse; men and angels will curse them for all time. Then they will be thrown into the everlasting fire. Who but a fool would ignore the moral of past events like those in our story of the vizier’s execution? ...

Nimrod was one of these. Because of their lack of faith, all the nations before him had suffered great calamities and been wiped out by disaster. They had all despised their Prophets. They had opposed Allāh, forgotten their humanity, imagined that power belonged to them, turned from the path of guidance, light and salvation, and followed the way of error, darkness,

disbelief, and tyranny. In consequence, they had met with disaster and incurred the threatened punishment.

Although he could see their relics all around, Nimrod proclaimed his own divinity, saying: “I am God of the Earth.” He was arrogant and proud. His treasury was full, his army strong and his kingdom wide. He had triumphed over his foes. When the venerable Abraham was sent as Messenger to him and his people, he said to him: “Who is this Allāh to whom you call me? That Allāh belongs to the heavens. I am God of the Earth.” He had forgotten that he came from sperm. He did not recall that he had entered the world through an organ of urination.

This fool was the ruler of a kingdom. A great nation was subject to this man. If he had been unintelligent, he could not have ruled. He did have a mind, but he lacked divine help and guidance. A person may be a ruler, yet he cannot be a man if he is not even aware of whence he comes and whither he is going. Since Satan is the friend of unbelievers, they acquire the attributes of Satan, becoming too arrogant to reflect on their original nature. Satan and the worldly life they worship make them turn their backs on the light, thrusting them into the darkness.

This rascal called Nimrod was so arrogant that he forgot from Whom he had received his kingdom; his power went to his head and he thought it was his forevermore. When Allāh’s friend invited him to the Truth, he said: “Is there any God apart from me, to Whom you could invite me?” The venerable Abraham replied: “Yes, He is my Lord, who created you and me, who will cause us both to die, and who will bring us back to life after death. To Him I call you.” Said Nimrod: “I do those things too. I am God; I bring to life and I cause death.” Then he had two convicts brought from jail, killing one of them and letting the other go free. “You see,” he said to the venerable Abraham, “I have done that.”

Was he really too stupid to know the meaning of causing a man to live or die? Or was he misled by his own obstinacy? The truth will be known at the Place of Resurrection. The venerable Prophet refuted his fallacy, and the fallacies of all such unbelievers till the Resurrection, by saying: “My Lord brings the sun from the East and carries it to the West. Let us see you take it in the opposite direction, from West to East!” Nimrod was at a loss for an answer to this challenge, for Allāh does not give guidance to tyrants. Falsehood is always defeated; truth always prevails, sooner or later. Nimrod had the venerable Abraham cast into the furnace, but Nimrod’s fire became light for him:

They said: ‘Burn him and stand by your gods, if you are going to act.’ We said; ‘O Fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham.’ They wished to set a trap for him, but We made them the greater losers. [21:68-70]

Although he witnessed this display of divine Power, Nimrod was not endowed with faith. In the end, that proud man was destroyed by that most insignificant of creatures, the mosquito. A microbe, visible only through a microscope, would have been sufficient for the purpose, but Allāh chose to use the smallest of creatures known to people at that time ...

The Destruction of Nimrod

Nimrod’s destruction was at hand. God had been patient with him long enough. Nimrod imagined he had himself to thank for the respite he had been granted. He had become more and more cruel and unjust. His despotism knew no bounds. He summoned the venerable Abraham and said to him: “Tell your God that I neither fear Him nor need Him! Go, tell him

that the whole world is in awe of me. All people are obedient to my command. If He is God of Heaven, I am God of the Earth. Where are His armies? If the sky fell on my troops, they could hold it up with their lances. Tell Him I challenge Him to battle. He has no say on earth. The whole earth belongs to me; it is my kingdom."

The answer was revealed to Abraham: "Let him come to such and such a place, where I shall do battle with him!" The venerable friend of Allāh passed the news to Nimrod.

On the day appointed, the brigades and regiments assembled on the battlefield, forming themselves in ranks, The Glorified and Exalted Lord gave His army of mosquitoes their orders, then sent these humble creatures into action against the proud and stubborn unbeliever who claimed to be deity. The heavens turned black, as Nimrod's horde stood ready for battle. When the order was given, the host of mosquitoes hurled themselves in their hundreds of millions against the army of the enemy of Allāh. They filled the soldiers' mouths, eyes and ears, biting with a vengeance. When the cavalry horses met the mosquitoes' onslaught, they started to bolt in all directions, unseating their riders as they fled. In the space of half an hour, destruction had overtaken Nimrod's army, more than a hundred thousand strong.

Nimrod himself left the field of battle, taking refuge in one of his castles. He thought he had saved his life by stopping up all doors and windows. In spite of the great miracle he had witnessed, he could not bring himself to repentance and faith. How could he do so, without overcoming his arrogance and pride? The scoundrel was willfully obstinate in his disbelief. His troops were all topsy-turvy. One lame mosquito, with a damaged wing, had been unable to obey the divine command to attack this stubborn infidel. It now addressed itself to Allāh, saying, "My Lord, what a sinful and

luckless creature I must be, that You should deprive me of my share in this battle! If only my leg and wing had been sound, I would have done my bit in fighting this enemy of Yours!" Allāh, Lord of Majesty, then gave it the command: "Go now! You destroy that accursed one!"

The lame mosquito made its way, limping, to the castle where Nimrod was hiding. Getting in through a keyhole, it went and settled on Nimrod's knee. There it rested, recovering from its exhaustion. Nimrod spotted the insect and tried to kill it, but the mosquito settled on his other knee. As it rested there, it seemed to say: "You once told the venerable Abraham that you had the power of life and death. You sought to prove it by killing one man and letting another go free. Come, what's to stop you killing me?"

Nimrod could not kill the insect, no matter how he tried. Allāh was demonstrating his weakness to him, as if to say: "Unless I will it, you cannot kill. When you killed men by My will, you imagined that you have done the killing. Look, you are a nonentity. You used the kingdom I gave you as a pretext for disobeying Me. You are a nothing. Nothing. What has become of the arrogance of yours? Where are your armies? Where is your divinity? Look, you have been conquered by that humble creature of Mine, the mosquito. You have been disgraced."

For all his efforts, Nimrod still could not kill the mosquito, which now went up inside his nose. Once upon a time, Nimrod had wanted to burn Abraham in the furnace, but in that he had also failed. The fire would not burn. Fire is only secondary cause, the Real Cause being Allāh.

The mosquito started eating the membrane of Nimrod's brain. The tyrant beat his head from rock to rock. Now he had really begun to feel the pain of his defeat. He had felt no sympathy for the hundred thousand soldiers he

had left on the battlefield, nor for their bereaved parents. His only thought had been to save his filthy skin and rotten soul by running to hide in his castle; but hiding could not save him from the dread claws of death.

How many lives he had slaughtered, how many houses he had destroyed, how many brains he had dashed out! Now he was dashing his own head against the rocks and walls; now he was suffering himself the pain he had inflicted on others.

If he had known how sweet life is, would he have snuffed out the lives of others? Would he have declared war upon Allāh? Believers take note! If Allāh had restored to this suffering Nimrod his kingdom and power, he would have become his tyrannical old self once again. Unbelievers cry "Allāh" when some misfortune befalls them, only to deny Him again as soon as that trouble is over. Allāh explains this in His Qur'ān. That is why the saints pray: "Lord, let us not be among those who cry "Allāh" in times of hardship and misfortune." Disbelievers do not remember Allāh in times of ease, but recall Him only in trouble and distress. The believer does not forget Allāh at any time; he remembers Him in good times and in bad, in hardship and in ease.

Nimrod appointed salaried officials to hit him on the head with mallets. The blows gave him a brief respite, since they interrupted the insect's work. As soon as the mosquito began eating his brain once more, he would cry: "Help! Hit me!" He would get angry with those who did not hit hard enough, while he increased the salaries of those who were hard hitters.

The "God of the Earth" was being beaten by his servants. One day, one of these servants wielded the mallet too hard, and Nimrod's evil soul departed. They laid his filthy corpse in the pit of Hell that was his tomb.

So much for his claim to divinity! Do not belittle the grave, where pride in wealth and power ends up. It is either one of the pits of Hell, or one of gardens of Paradise. The Messenger, on him be peace, has told us so.

For the venerable Abraham, Nimrod's fire turned to light.

For friends of Allāh, the Fire becomes a rose garden.

Because he had been negligent toward his Beloved, the venerable Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his own son. But because of Ishmael's obedience to his father, the knife did not cut. Joseph's brothers were envious of him, so they threw him down a well in the land of Canaan. When he was found there by a passing caravan, his brothers sold him on the slave market in Egypt. Because Joseph controlled his lower nature, he became mighty in Egypt. Because Zulaykha was controlled by her lower self, that mighty queen fell into degradation.

Be master of your lower self; you will then acquire great dignity! If you be come the prisoner of your lower nature, you will be degraded! Zulaykha was delivered from this degradation through her "metaphorical" love of a noble Prophet. Even if they are captives of their lower selves, those who love the Prophets will one day be brought to salvation by their loved ones.

THE BLESSED PROPHETS: DAVID, SOLOMON, MOSES, JESUS ...

David and Solomon were both Messengers and rulers. They held sway over men and jinn, over the birds and the winds. Time passed. Struggling with destiny to find his enemy, Pharaoh massacred thousands of infants, ninety thousand innocents he slew. But these measures could not avert inexorable fate. Moses, on him be peace, was born. Pharaoh's enemy was in his own lap. He embraced him like a beloved son, then raised him in his own household.

While he was attached to the Egyptian royal palace, the Prophet Moses accidentally killed a prominent statesman. He fled to the land of Midian, where he became the son-in-law of Shu°ayb, on him be peace. While emigrating from Midian, he came to Mount Sinai. He encountered his Lord, while going in search of fire. Prophethood was bestowed upon him. He was commanded to invite Pharaoh to faith. He was given his miraculous staff and came to possess the White Hand. He begged his Lord to make Aaron his minister. The All-Glorious One agreed. Together with Aaron, on him be peace, Moses went to summon Pharaoh to faith and to ask him to free the Children of Israel. His staff became a serpent, confounding the sorcerers.

The Egyptians were afflicted with the Ten Plagues, but they did not see reason. Pharaoh and his army were drowned. The Children of Israel were saved. The venerable Moses went to Mount Sinai and asked to see his Lord. But he was told:

"You will not be able to see Me, O Moses!" Then came the venerable Jesus, who performed many miracles. By God's leave, he raised the dead to life. He opened the eyes of those who had been blind since birth. He cured the lepers. He fashioned a bird out of clay; when he blew on it, it became a living bird. They plotted to kill the venerable Jesus, but Allāh raised him up to heaven.

THE “SEAL OF THE PROPHETS”

One hundred and twenty thousand or two hundred and twenty thousand Prophets came and went. With the Seal of the Prophets, the caravan of the Messengers was complete. The veil had been lifted, revealing the appearance of the Primal Light and Final Prophet, the crowning glory foretold by all the former Prophets, the Messenger of the Almighty, the beloved of the First of the first, belonging to the Last of the last, a light to which the sun is a moth, whose creation was the cause of the universe, the glory of Adam, prince of the mystery of “But for you, but for you, I would not have created the spheres,” the moon of all the Prophets, speaker and teacher of the Good Sentence “lā ilāha illā-llāh,” master of the Qur’ān, friend of the All-Merciful, a mercy to all beings, our Master and

Messenger, who is bliss for the pure and a mercy to the eighteen thousand worlds, the master of the universe, the refuge of the Prophets, the generous prince of the Messengers, sent from Allāh, the Chosen and Selected Prophet of heaven and earth, of men and jinn, the trustworthy guide, the Messenger of both species, the Imām of the Two Sanctuaries, the grandfather of Hasan and Husayn, the shining lamp, the leader of the righteous, the Messenger of the Almighty, the pre-eminent Arabian of the tribe of Quraysh and the clan of Hāshim.

The world became a different world. The roses laughed and the nightingales began to sing. The color of water turned clear and bright. All those who were thirsty quenched their thirst. Paradise was decked out, the houries were adorned and the pavilions of Paradise were beautified. The ocean of mercy overflowed. The good tidings were proclaimed: “My mercy has exceeded My wrath.” The idols in the Ka°ba were cast down. The Magian

fire was extinguished, after burning for a thousand years. Fourteen balconies in Chosroes' palace collapsed. The priests were struck dumb. Lake Sava disappeared into the earth. The envious burst with their envy. The oppressed and lonely had found a friend. Tears gave way to laughter. Satan was driven from heaven. All because Allāh's beloved Muhammad had come.

He lost his father when he had been seven months in his mother's womb; at the age of six he lost his mother too. The angels were amazed and dismayed to see this state of affairs. Was there some hidden mystery here? They asked God, "O Lord, for what wise but secret reason have You made an orphan of this most holy being, who You call Your Beloved? Make us aware of this mystery, for every decree of Yours conceals wise secrets by the thousands." Their Lord replied, "O My angels, if his mother and father had survived, they would have raised My beloved Muhammad. As things are, I shall give My loved one his training."

The Lord continued, "If my beloved had suffered some wrong, he would have called on his parents for help. Now he has no close relatives to turn to. Should he be mistreated, he will have recourse to Me and look to Me for help. I am the Lord of those without kith or kin. My beloved will be trained, not by his mother and father, but by My Glorious Majesty. He will be protected, not by his parents, but by Me."

He was bidden to manifest his Prophethood. At the age of forty-three, he ascended the throne of Messengerhood. Until then, people called him "Muhammad the Trustworthy." His body was pure, his radiance apparent. He assembled his people, saying, "O my people! Suppose I told you there was an army behind that hill, preparing to attack Mecca. How would you treat my words?" They said, "You are trustworthy and true, a man of your word. If you told us that, we would go forth to fight." Our Master then said,

“God has sent me to you as a Prophet. Believe in me as a Messenger of God. Do not attribute partners to Allāh. Do not worship idols.” But they all rejected him and turned away. The only one to believe in him was his beloved wife Khadīja, may Allāh be pleased with her.

The first to believe was our Mother, the venerable Khadīja. Then she was joined by Imām °Alī, still a boy in their care. The first grown man to believe was Abū Bakr, while the first from among the slaves was Zayd, whose name is mentioned explicitly in the Noble Qur’ān. None of the other Companions is mentioned there by name. These were the first believers. The good pleasure of Allāh be upon them all.

Qur’ānic Verses began to be revealed. The more Verses came down, the more intense became the envy of the envious. The more stubborn they grew in their obstinacy, the more Verses were revealed. These revealed Verses reduced the poets to silence. The believers became more numerous, mostly among the poor, the slaves and the womenfolk. But this increase in the number of believers was matched by increasing cruelty and oppression on the part of the stubborn unbelievers.

Wherever they saw that glorious and reverend Prophet, they would assault and insult him. Every Prophet who came before our Master had suffered the same rejection and abuse. But the Lord God sent down Verses to console His beloved, addressing him with various gracious favors to relieve his sadness.

When the All-Glorious Lord created the Light of Muhammad before time began, He inscribed upon the Throne, “I am Allāh; other than Me there is no god to be worshipped. Muhammad is My beloved Messenger. Those who submit to My decree, endure My trials patiently and are grateful for

My bounty, I shall record among the veracious ones, with whom I shall resurrect them. As for those who do not submit to My decree, who are impatient with My trials and ungrateful for My bounty, let them try to find another god than Me!”

When those unbelievers said, “You are no Prophet!” his Lord told him, “You are indeed one of the Envoys.” When they saddened our Master by telling him he was not a Messenger, the Lord of All Worlds said to him: “What if they deny your Prophethood? Is it not enough for you that I bear witness to it?”

And Allāh is sufficient as a Witness. [4:166]

But for the denials of Abū Jahl, °Utba, Ubayy ibn Khalaf and other prominent men of Quraysh, how would so many clear Verses have been revealed? The more their enmity toward the Messenger intensified, the more Allāh increased His gracious favor toward His beloved.

This means that your level and degree depend on your love. The more trouble you undergo in Allāh’s cause, the more you will enjoy His grace.

One day[2] our Master was sitting at a corner of the Ka°ba worshipping the Lord of all the Worlds. He begged his Lord that his people might achieve right guidance. The accursed Abū Jahl came along with a dissolute gang and they stopped by the Ka°ba to talk. They were plotting against Islam and planning to play tricks upon the Muslims. One of them noticed our Master and mentioned his presence to Abū Jahl, who immediately approached the Messenger of Allāh, along with his dissolute gang. “O Muhammad,” said

Abū Jahl mockingly, “are you really a prophet?” The glorious Messenger took the question seriously and replied with dignity: “Yes, I am a Messenger; I am a Prophet.” At this, that profligate crew began to scoff with impudent sarcasm: “How can you be a prophet? You are an orphan; you did not go to school; you had no teacher; Abū Tālib brought you up as a poor orphan. How dare you ignore the limitations of this humble background and pretend to be a prophet? Perhaps you are making this claim with the intention of making yourself our equal or even our chief. Give up this pretentious notion. If prophethood came to anybody, if such a thing could really happen, it would have to come to me or to one of my peers like °Utba or Ubayy ibn Khalaf. They are literate people like me; they are also leaders of our tribe. You may have gathered a few followers, but they are not rich and enlightened people like my friends. They are slaves and camelherds; they are our servants who live off our leftovers. It is these dregs of our people who have rallied to you. Those who are with me are the rich and powerful members of this nation, so give up this claim of yours. How could we possibly share the belief of these slaves and servants—this bunch of peasants? How could we sit in their company? We are great men, leaders of the tribe, while those who believe in you are poor people and slaves.” With such cruel and illogical words, they rejected the pure-hearted Messenger of Messengers and went away.

The same scene was repeated first with the unbeliever, Ubayy ibn Khalaf and his gang, then by Walīd ibn Mughīra and other leaders of Quraysh, all equally obstinate in their disbelief, depraved, corrupt and misguided. It was as if they had all conspired together.

These irrational attacks made the Messenger of Messengers very sad indeed. What wrong-headed people these were. Why should being a poor orphan debar him from prophethood? What person of learning or experience could produce anything like this Mighty Qur’ān, which he had brought to the world without benefit of school or college, teacher or

professor. It was a miracle that this Qur’ān should have been revealed to an illiterate without formal education.

They became extreme in their disrespectful and mocking effrontery toward this savior, sent to invite them to salvation, to success, to humanity, to Paradise and to Allāh. These obstinate and envious people either did not know what a Messenger and Prophet really was, or else their rejection was deliberate; either way, they were confusing Prophethood with kingship and tribal chieftaincy. They were seeking in the Prophet, on him be peace, the attributes necessary to worldly rulers. But could a man help it if he had grown up an orphan? Why should this stand in the way of his becoming a Prophet? Surely the venerable Adam was a Prophet and Messenger, but did he have a father and mother? As for our Master Jesus, he had a mother but no father, yet he was also a Prophet and Messenger.

Our blessed Master made no reply to the scornful words of the ignorant or envious unbelievers. His pure heart was sorely wounded and his blessed eyes filled with tears. Sad and distraught, he made his way from the Ka°ba to the house of his cousin, Umm Hāni’, the daughter of Abū Tālib and sister of Imām °Alī.

His blessed face showed the marks of sorrow. Seeing the Messenger in this perplexity, Umm Hāni’ took his hands in hers as she asked what was wrong. When she heard of the disrespectful attacks that had so grieved our Master, Umm Hāni’ said: “O Messenger of Allāh, they are well aware that you are a true Prophet. They act that way out of envy.” Then she added: “We have accepted your Mission. The All-Glorious Lord has Himself proclaimed and confirmed your Mission. Is that not enough for you?”

Envy is a terribly bad habit. Those who suffer from it are unable to distinguish truth from falsehood; they tumble into such an abyss that they are as bad as the devil, if not worse. The envier is filled with a consuming fire, even hotter than the fire of Hell. He stoops to every kind of meanness. He knows nothing of honor, virtue and sanctity. In His Noble Qur'ān, the All-Glorious One says: "Take refuge with Me from the envy of the envious." With Him we take refuge indeed!

It was this fire of envy that filled the unbelievers of Quraysh, afflicting them more intensely with every day that passed. They tried to extinguish the light of guidance that shone before them, but the harder they blew, the more brightly it shone. It seemed as if they were all blind. Since they could not see this light, this sun of guidance, they had nothing but scorn for those who followed God's emissary to salvation.

Night came and darkness fell.

THE NIGHT OF THE HEAVENLY ASCENSION (MI°RĀJ)

Saddened by the despicable treatment he had received during the day, our Master prayed before lying down to sleep. His blessed heart ached and his eyes were moist with tears. He had barely dropped off to sleep, when the Lord of Majesty said:

"O Gabriel, do you know what night this is? Tonight, convey my command and good tidings to all My worlds! Tonight I shall take My beloved to My station. My Heavens, My Lotus Tree, My Prosperous House, My Throne, My Footstool and My Paradise will be adorned with the dust of My

beloved’s feet. Tell Isrāfīl to leave his trumpet for tonight; I have commanded him to wait at My beloved’s service. Let Michael postpone the distribution of provisions. Let °Azrā’īl leave the gathering of souls for tonight. To them and to you I have granted the honor of serving My beloved. For tonight, let Mālik put out the fire of Hell. Let the wardens of Hell not stir from their places. Let My Paradise be decked out afresh. Tell Ridwān that the houries, pages and attendants must make ready. Let them wear new heavenly clothes and put on their finery. They must get ready to receive My beloved. Tonight I have invited My beloved Muhammad. Let them clothe the sun in the empyrean. Let the sky be more splendidly arrayed than on an ordinary night. Let the stars shine brighter than usual. Let the souls of the Prophets prepare to greet Muhammad! O Gabriel, go to Paradise and fetch for My beloved a splendid robe, a crown, a belt and the heavenly steed called Burāq. Let him don the robe, set the crown upon his head and gird himself with the belt. Let him mount Burāq; let him ride to see My Throne, My Footstool and My Paradise! Give My salutations to that Messenger! He is now lying in the home of Umm Hāni’, sad and dismayed by the cruelty of those unbelievers.

“Let him come! Let him behold My Throne, My Pedestal and My Paradise. Those unbelievers have been saying: ‘You are poor, while we are rich. Might and power belongs to us. You have no friends except beggars and slaves.’ O Gabriel, who is really poor, who is rich, who is mighty, who is humble, who is temporary, who is enduring? Tonight, I shall bestow on him My grace and favor as I have not done, and shall never do, for any other Messenger and Prophet. I shall show him the favors I have prepared for his Community. O Gabriel, he is very precious to Me. He is a mercy to eighteen thousand, to eighteen million worlds. Had I not created him, I would not have created this universe. His eulogist am I. For him I created My all. For Myself I created him. I am witness to his Prophethood. He is Mine and I am his. O Gabriel, treat him politely; let your kindness tonight be greater than on any other night. You spent twenty thousand years performing a prayer of two cycles for Me. No servant of Mine ever did Me such worship. As your

reward for that worship, I have granted you the favor of serving My beloved tonight."

That venerable Gabriel went to Paradise, where he saw that the heavenly steeds were pasturing in herds. They were all happy and content, except for one Burāq, which was pale and wan. It stood weeping in a corner, its face streaked with tears and bearing the mark of love.

The venerable Gabriel approached the poor beast, wondering at its condition. "What is the matter with you? Why don't you eat or drink? Why so pale and wan? This is paradise, the abode of happiness; there is no weeping, no sad ness here." Burāq found the words to say: "I am stricken with the pain of love. My love is my constant companion. I have not seen him, but I have heard his name. That name is my remedy. If I see his beauty, my face will brighten with joy. I have been in this state for thousands of years. I heard a voice crying: O Muhammad!' From that moment, I have been in love with the owner of that name. You see me here in Paradise, the abode of happiness. But this is only my outer form; in reality, I am in the fire of separation. Love is my bounty, tears my joy. These are the faithful witnesses to my love. My paleness and wanness are my delight, my streaming tears the token of my love. Surely this pain of mine will lead me to its remedy. One day it will unite me with my loved one. My pain has become my remedy." "Good news, O Burāq!" cried Gabriel. "Tonight I shall lead you to your beloved. Your steadfast patience in love has brought you to the one you love. That most holy being is not your beloved alone; all creatures have been created for love of him. The Lord of All Worlds is his lover also, as are the Footstool, the Tablet, the Pen and Paradise. His lovers are without number. Just as your love for him has now brought you to him, so will their love unite them with him one day; this condition of yours is certain proof of this.

“They say the lover is with the loved one. Come on, Burāq, let’s be on our way to your beloved Muhammad ... ” In one moment of time, they had reached the city of Mecca and arrived at the Ka°ba. All the other noble angels came too, and Mecca and the sky above it were filled with the angel hosts.

This was a most important night. On this night, Allāh would show His beloved wonders peculiar to His Essence of Divinity, admitting him to the mystery of the Two Bow-lengths, a station inaccessible to any other creature. The Chosen Messenger would be allowed to witness marvels hidden from the sight of creatures and of angels, even those angels near the Throne. On this night, he would be brought to the “Palace Beyond Space.”

There, each pain would find a thousand kinds of remedy. The sins of God’s servants would be forgiven, for love of His beloved, and the entire Community of Muhammad would be delivered from the Fire and granted Paradise; the mystery of the Two Bow-lengths would be revealed and the Unity of the Divine Essence made known.

From the manifestations of the Attributes, the manifestations of the Essence would be revealed. Lover and beloved would be united. He would be shown the stations of all Messengers; he would lead the souls of the Prophets in worship; he would pass beyond the Station of Gabriel. All the sinners of the Community of Muhammad would be delivered from the Fire and given to the Messenger. He would learn the secret of “and your Lord will surely give to you.”[3] The Almighty would address ninety thousand words to His beloved. Mysteries would be revealed, such as no tongue could tell and no pen could write.

According to Ibn °Abbās, our Master said: “I had just worshipped and gone to bed. Realizing that Gabriel had come, I sat up in my bed. I saw Gabriel standing there saying: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, greetings to you from Allāh.’ He invites you tonight. I have come to fetch you. This night, the All-Glorious One will do you great honor; no one before you ever attained such exalted grace and favor, nor will such blessedness be conferred on anyone after you. No one ever saw or heard of such grace and favor as will be yours tonight. Let us go now, for your moment has arrived. Tonight, you are the guest of the King. No predecessor ever deserved such bounty, nor will any successor be able to achieve such exaltation.”

The venerable Moses conversed on Mount Sinai with the Lord whose Existence is Necessary. “My Lord,” he begged, “Show me Your Beautiful Countenance. Let me see. Let me behold Your Beauty!” But he was told: “Moses, you cannot see Me; you are incapable of seeing Me! But look at the mountain. I shall manifest to it. If the mountain can bear My manifestation, you will be able to do so too.” But the mountain could not bear the divine manifestation and it dissolved into pieces. The venerable Moses fell in a faint. When he had recovered consciousness, he said: “My Lord, I declare You exempt from all attributes of deficiency; I qualify You with the attributes of perfection. To You I repent. Without seeing You, I am one of the first to have faith in You.” Moses, the Converser, wished to see. But he had been unable to see. Now, God Almighty desired to show Himself to His beloved.

How this might be, we cannot know; the manner of it is known only to Allāh. The six directions do not apply to Him; He is unquantifiable and His modality is unknown to us. Existing beyond direction, location and time, He would show Himself to His beloved. Yet this He would promise not to His beloved alone, but also to us sinners, the members of his community. Some highly honored faces will behold the Beauty and Perfection of the Lord at the Resurrection. We shall be granted this favor. To see Him, however, the eye must be prepared. As for those who do not see truth and

reality in the world below, the Qur'ān tells us that they will not only not see the Lord of the Worlds; those who turn their backs on the Qur'ān and on His beloved will be resurrected blind. That sight belongs to the eye that weeps for God's sake, to those who observe reality and truth.

The Messenger gave his Companions the good tidings: "You will see your Lord from the Garden of Paradise, just as you behold the full moon on the fifteenth of the month!" In other words, the divine manifestation will be apparent to each believer according to his capacity.

As we have said already, the manner of this is beyond our knowledge; it is known only to Allāh. God is exempt from spatial location. He will show Himself to the believers, and the believers will see Him. As Allāh wills ... May Allāh bestow His grace upon us all. Amen. For the sake of the Chief of the Messengers.

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Our Master said: "I heard the voice of Gabriel the Trustworthy. I heard what he said to me. I arose at once and looked for a jug so that I might make my ablution. At that moment, Ridwān brought from Paradise a golden jug inlaid with emeralds, as well as a bowl with four huge emeralds in front, which reflected the light of heaven.

"This jug of Paradise had been filled with the water of Kawthar, in accordance with Allāh's command to Ridwān. I made my ablution with the water of Kawthar, as it poured from that jug into that bowl. They took me to the Ka°ba, to the spot called the Seal, where they laid me down. They

opened my breast and removed my heart. They washed it with water of Zamzam. They filled it with the light of esoteric wisdom and then set it back in place. They dressed me in a splendid robe from Paradise and wound a turban on my head; that turban also came from Paradise. Upon the turban was set a crown, as brilliant as the sun. They wrapped a fine girdle around my waist. Its surface was made of red ruby. When I looked for a mount, Gabriel brought Burāq and told me to ride. Burāq jibbed. What are you doing, Burāq?' said Gabriel. 'What effrontery is this?' But Burāq replied: I shall not let anyone ride me except Muhammad, on him be peace. Then Gabriel told him: 'Here you behold the one you love, with love for whom you have been burning day and night, Allāh's beloved Muhammad.' At this Burāq put his face to the ground, shedding tears of love as he begged: 'O Messenger of Allāh, for love of you I have forsaken Paradise. Give me your word. Promise that you will mount me again on the coming Day of Resurrection, to enter Paradise on my back!' " Our noble Master of the Ascension gave his promise, weeping as he undertook to enter Paradise with the same Burāq, when he should arise from his tomb. "O Messenger of Allāh," asked Gabriel, "why are you weeping so?" and our Master said: "When I arise from my tomb, I shall go to the Place of Resurrection riding Burāq. But will my Community have to go there on foot?" At this point in the conversation, the following Verse was revealed:

Then We shall gather the righteous before the All-Merciful, a mounted company. [19:85]

Our Master was consoled. He offered praise and thanks to Allāh, the Lord of all worlds, who would also let his Community ride to the Place of Resurrection. When the Day of Resurrection comes, men will rise from their graves in three groups:

i) The Prophets and Messengers, the saints and the righteous; to them, Burāqs will be sent from Paradise. Wearing robes of Paradise and enjoying food and drink of Paradise, they will mount these heavenly steeds and ride in state to the Place of Resurrection.

ii) The sinful members of the Community of Muhammad. They will rise from their graves to be driven, naked and on foot, to the Place of Resurrection. When our Master mentioned that these people would be resurrected in a naked state, the venerable °Ā'isha, Mother of the Believers asked: "O Messenger of Allāh, won't the men look at the woman among them?" But our Master replied: "°Ā'isha, such will be the Day of Resurrection that no one will have eyes for any but himself. Each person will be turned in on himself."

iii) The unbelievers who denied the resurrection after death. These will rub dust on their heads, crying: Who has raised us from our graves? Alas for our condition! We used to deny this day." The Angels will say, as they drag these unbelievers from their graves: "You see, this is what the All-Merciful promised. The Messenger told you that this day would be like this." They will be driven to the Place of Resurrection with their faces to the ground.

When the noble Companions heard about this from our Master, they asked him "O Messenger of Allāh, how can a man walk with his face dragging on the ground?" Our Master replied: "Have you not seen how snakes and worms crawl along on their faces? That is how the unbelievers will drag themselves along as they are driven to the Place of Resurrection."

When our Master, the King of Prophets, heard the good news that Allāh had graciously promised to let righteous believers ride to the Place of Resurrection, he happily mounted Burāq. Gabriel had come with the angel

hosts. Our Master tells us that the angelic armies of Michael and Isrāfīl fell in to right and left behind him.

When our Master wished to take leave of these mighty angels, the venerable Isrāfīl said: “O Messenger of Allāh, I worshipped my Lord for so many years that I might serve you tonight, and I have been honored with this duty.” Our Master asked him how he had worshipped and prayed. Said the venerable Isrāfīl: “I worshipped for many thousands of years beneath the Throne. Then the Almighty said: ‘What do you want? I shall grant your wish.’ I replied: ‘My Lord, the intercessor for the community of sinners, the Sultan of the Day of Resurrection; it seems You have inscribed his name upon the throne, along with Your own Noble Name. When he comes to bodily existence, let me spend an hour in his service.’ Said the Lord Almighty: ‘I agree to your request. There will be a night on which I enable him to draw near to Me, that revered Prophet whose name I have inscribed beside My own. I shall convey him from a spot on earth up to My highest universe. I shall show him wonders peculiar to My Essence. I shall open to him the gates of My treasuries. I shall bring him from Mecca to Jerusalem, and from there I shall take him wherever I will. You may have the honor to escort him that night from Mecca to Jerusalem.’ ”

The other mighty angels were also happy to serve our Master, the Lord’s be loved, that night. To obtain this honor, they had worshipped Allāh for many thousands of years.

Our Master continues his report: “Burāq touched down at a place he had spotted. There were many trees where he had landed. The venerable Gabriel said, ‘Messenger of Allāh, alight here and perform your prayers.’ I got down and did my prayers, then I asked Gabriel the name of the place we had come to. ‘This is Medina the Illumined,’ said he. ‘You will shortly migrate to this place.’ We moved on to a place where the soil was white.

Gabriel told me to alight and pray, so I did as he bade me. Then Gabriel asked me where we were. When I told him I did not know, he said, ‘This is Midian. The venerable Moses performed his prayers beneath this very tree, when he was fleeing from Pharaoh.’

“I remounted Burāq and we reached a sacred spot. I followed my instructions to alight and pray. Then Gabriel said, ‘Messenger of Allāh, this is Mount Sinai. It was here that the venerable Moses used to converse with Allāh.’ I remounted and rode on until we saw a pavilion. Again I dismounted and prayed as I was told to do. Then Gabriel said, ‘Messenger of Allāh, this is the pavilion where Mary’s son, Jesus was born.’ Later, I saw a group of people sowing seed. Each seed was immediately producing seven hundred. When I asked who these people were Gabriel said, ‘These are the members of your Community who spend their wealth in Allāh’s cause. For this good deed they receive seven hundred rewards.’ Then I saw another group. Angels were smashing their heads with rocks; these heads grew back, only to be smashed again, then they grew back anew. Gabriel explained, ‘Those who are suffering such torment are the members of your Community who neglect the prayers. They are those who pray, but who are absentminded and do not raise their heads completely when they straighten up from bowing and prostration. They do the prayers reluctantly, attaching no importance to them. Although they pray, they also serve unbelievers, tyrants and their own lower natures.’

“Then I saw another group. These were starving and naked, surrounded by flaming grass, which the angels were forcing them to eat like animals. When I asked who they were, Gabriel said, ‘These are the greedy members of your Community, who do not pay their alms-due. They are those who are lacking in compassion for the poor, the weak, the destitute, widows and orphans.’

Then I saw another company. Delicious food lay before them, but instead of this pure food they were eating stinking carrion. Gabriel explained, ‘Messenger of Allāh, these are the adulterers and fornicators among your Community. Although lawful food is available to them, they choose to eat carrion by committing unlawful acts like adultery and fornication.’

“Then I saw another group. These were stacking wood, but they could not lift it. When I asked who they were, I was told, ‘These are the avaricious members of your Community. Although they could never exhaust the wealth they possess, they are not satisfied and try to accumulate even more. They are those who love worldly goods and try to pile them up. They accumulate fire in Hell, for they violate human rights, being unwilling to lighten their loads and give others their due.’

“Then I saw a great rock, in which there was a little hole. A snake emerged from the hole, grew bigger, then went back and tried to re-enter. When it could not get in, it started circling the rock in confusion. I asked the meaning of this, and Gabriel explained, ‘This rock represents the body of your Community. This small hole stands for their mouths. The snake symbolizes bad words, unlawful speech and backbiting. Having uttered these things, they will not be able to take them back and swallow them. They must therefore suffer torment in this world and the Hereafter. Tell your Community to guard their mouths against cursing, abuse, backbiting, foul speech and careless talk, so that they may be saved in this world and the Hereafter.’

“Then I saw a man. He was struggling to draw water from a well. The bucket was empty by the time it reached the rim of the well. The man was exerting himself in vain. ‘What does he represent?’ I asked. Said Gabriel, ‘Those of your Com munity who worship only for show. Worship that is not for Allāh is as fruitless as this man’s toll, for those whose worship is merely

ostentation will certainly get no reward in the Hereafter. All they get is fatigue.'

"The people I saw next had drooping lips, which the angels were cutting with fiery scissors. When I asked who they were, I was told, 'These are the members of your Community who act as informers and those who bear false witness.'

"Then I saw another set of people. The angels were cutting up their flesh and ordering them to eat it. When they refused, the angels beat them and forced them to eat. When I asked Gabriel who they were and why they were undergoing this torment, he replied, 'These are the backbiters of your Community.'

"Then I saw another group of people; they had dirty faces, pale eyes and drooping lips; blood and filth flowed from their mouths. Each held a fiery bottle in one hand and a fiery cup in the other, into which the pus flowing from his mouth was poured. When they had filled their cups with blood and filth the angels forced them to drink. This was a torment for them. When I asked about them, Gabriel said, 'O Messenger of Allāh, these are the members of your Community who die without repenting for drinking alcohol.'

"Then I saw another group. They had swollen bellies and their feet were shackled. They kept trying to get up, only to stumble and fall. 'Who are these?' I asked. Gabriel, on him be peace, said, 'These are the usurers, those members of your Community who rob people of their goods and consume them wrongfully.'

“Then I encountered a company of women. Their faces were dirty; they were wearing fiery clothes and the angels were beating them with fiery whips. They were shouting at each other. I asked Gabriel, on him be peace, who these women were and he told me, ‘These are the women of your Community who have either committed adultery and fornication or else treated their husbands badly and shown nothing but ingratitude for the benefits their husbands provided.’

“Then I saw a group of men being beheaded. When I asked who they were, Gabriel said, ‘These are the murderers in your Community; they are those who carry on blood feuds.’

“Then I saw a gang suffering the most violent torment. Flames were issuing from their mouths and noses and each of them was at the mercy of two angels of Hell wielding fiery whips. ‘Who are these?’ I asked, and Gabriel replied, These are the hypocrites. They are suffering this torment because, while their mouths profess faith, their hearts are full of disbelief and hypocrisy. They deserve to be punished in the lowest depths of Hell.’

Surely the hypocrites will be in the lowest depth of the Fire. [4:145]

“Then I met a group of people who were imprisoned in a valley of fire. As soon as they had been burnt to ashes, they grew fresh skin which was again burnt to ashes and then again restored. This was their perpetual torment. I asked who they were and why they were suffering this punishment, and the venerable Gabriel explained, ‘These are the people who disobey their parents. O Messenger of Allāh, the people undergoing this torment are the sinful children of your Community who do not appreciate their mothers and fathers, do not obey them, do not give them their due and fail to respect them.’

“Then I heard a frightful noise that made my hair stand on end. When I asked him what had caused this noise, Gabriel explained, ‘O Messenger of Allāh, a stone fell into Hell. It has just now reached the bottom after falling for a thousand years. That is the noise you hear.’

“Then I came to a valley, where the air smelled foul. A horrid voice could be heard, loudly entreating Allāh, ‘My Lord, send to me now the unbelievers and tyrants You promised me. My chains, spikes, manacles and fetters are all prepared. I have torments of all kinds in great abundance: bitter fruit and boiling water, serpents, centipedes and scorpions. My gullies are ablaze with terrifying fires. Send me the tyrants, unbelievers and traitors You promised me, so that I may avenge their victims. Let me take vengeance on those who enjoyed Your benefits yet ascribed partners to You, on those sinful deceivers who wronged the people. Let me do my duty.’ When I asked what this might be, Gabriel said, ‘That foul odor is the stench of Hell, while that awful, terrifying voice is the voice of Hell.’ In response to Hell’s supplication, the Glorious and Exalted One said, ‘O Fire! O Hell! I shall stock you with those who ascribe partners to Me, with the unbelievers who deny Me and My Messengers, with the tyrants who hurt and oppress My servants, with the traitors who consume the rights of orphans, with every wicked man and woman, and with those overbearing ones who do not believe until the Day of Resurrection. I shall fill you with unbelieving men and jinn and with obstinate, infidel tyrants.’ Hell said, ‘I am content, my Lord.’

“Then I came to another valley. Here I smelled beautiful perfumes. When I asked what it was, Gabriel said, ‘A lady martyr and her children lie here. That sweet smell comes from their tombs, which contain the fruits of Paradise. Those who lie buried here are the maidservant of Pharaoh’s daughter, and her children.’

“Then I came to yet another valley, where gentle breezes wafted subtle perfumes. The most pleasant sounds caressed my ears. ‘Gabriel,’ I asked, ‘What are those sweet scents; what are those lovely sounds?’ The venerable Gabriel explained: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, those sweet smells come from Paradise and that lovely sound is the voice of Paradise. Listen O Messenger of Allāh! I listened and heard Paradise making this supplication: My generous Lord, bring me now those servants of Yours whom You promised me. All has been adorned in readiness: my palaces, pavilions, tents, satin, brocade and silks, all kinds of gold, pearls, coral, emeralds, rubies and silver, musk and ambergris, goblets and cups, fruit of every kind, rivers of water, milk, honey and wine, houries, attendants and pages; bounties in great abundance, too numerous to count. Bring me now those special servants of Yours whom You promised to send into me. I grow impatient to receive them. Send me those servants of Yours, so that I may accord them every honor, respect and dignity, bestowing upon them every kind of bounty.’ To this appeal, the Most Generous of the most generous replied:

“ ‘My Paradise, to you I shall send those who believe in Me and all My obedient servants who give their hearts to My beloved, who affirm My Unity, believe in My Messengers and perform good works of righteousness and worship for Me, ascribe no partners to Me and put their trust in Me. In your gardens and orchards I shall lodge all those who fear Me and recoil from My punishment, from which I shall make them safe. I shall grant the wishes, and fulfill the needs, of all who submit their desires, intentions, needs and wishes to Me in prayer. I shall multiply the rewards and recompense of those who “make Me a loan,” i.e., do works of charity and give alms for My sake to the poor and the weak, the destitute and the needy. I shall be satisfied with all the works of those who put their lives entirely at My disposal, relying upon Me in all they undertake. I alone, Allāh, am worthy of worship and faith. There is no other god deserving faith and worship. I fulfill all My promises. I never go back on My word. All the believers will surely come to success. My Paradise is ready for them.

Paradise is the home of those who believe in Me. Those who believe in Me are your people.' (Blessed is Allāh, the best of Creators!) Hearing these divine words, Paradise said, 'I am content, my Lord!'

"I heard a voice on my right, calling, 'Stop, O Muhammad! I have a little question to ask you.' Three times this voice told me stop, but I ignored it and pressed on. Then I heard a voice on my left, calling three times, 'Stop, O Muhammad! Wait a moment. I have a question for you.' I ignored it and pressed on. Then a woman appeared in front of me, very beautifully dressed. From a distance she looked lovely, but on closer inspection she proved to be very ugly. I passed her by, ignoring her three cries of, 'Stop for a moment. I have a question for you.' Next I saw before me an old man, leaning on a stick. Shaking and trembling, this old man said three times, 'Stop. I have a question for you. Stop and let me see your beautiful countenance.' I passed him without a moment's pause. Then I saw a handsome young man. His face was radiant with light. He hailed me with, 'Stop, O Messenger of Allāh. I have something to say to you.' Burāq came to a halt. I exchanged salutations with the young man, who then said, 'Congratulations, O Muhammad! All goodness is in you and in your Community.' I extolled my Lord, saying, 'All praise belongs to Allāh.' Gabriel said the same.

"When I asked who these people were, Gabriel explained, 'O Messenger of Allāh, the voices from right and left were those of the corrupted religions. If you had responded to their call, they would have ensnared your community after your death and reduced it to degradation. As for the woman, if you had responded to her invitation, your entire Community would have forgotten Allāh after your death and taken to worshipping this world. Her beautiful ornaments and attire are symbolic of the world's deceptive charms. Her great age points to the Resurrection. As for her ugly appearance at close range, this indicates that all the ugliness of worldly life is exposed on reflection.'

“ ‘The old man who addressed you was Satan the accursed. He tried to exploit your compassionate nature by appearing to you in the guise of an old man. If you had stopped and taken notice of him, at the end of your life your Community would have lost salvation cheated by his wiles, for he would have succeeded in leading most of them astray and in causing them to enter the Hereafter without faith.

“ ‘As for that fresh and radiant youngster, he represents the religion of Islam. For him you stopped. This means that your Community, from the end of your earthly life until the Resurrection, will be secure against all guile of the foe and surefooted on the path of Islam.’ ”

Our Master, the Messenger to men and jinn, saw many more strange and wondrous things before reaching the Aqsā Mosque. Those we have related are the most famous. Our Master’s report continues, “When I reached the Aqsā Mosque, angels came down from heaven to greet me. They congratulated me on the favors and bounties I would receive from Allāh, saluting me with, ‘Peace be upon you, O first! Peace be upon you, O last! Peace be upon you, O gatherer!’ I said to Gabriel, ‘What do the angels mean by greeting and saluting me like this? It is Allāh who is the First, the Last and the Gatherer.’ The venerable Gabriel explained, ‘O Messenger of Allāh, on the Day of Resurrection, you will be the first to arise from your tomb. That is why they call you “gatherer.” On that Day, you will be the first to make intercession. Therefore they call you “first.” They salute you with “O last!” Because you are the final Messenger to be sent to the world.’

“When I reached the gate of the Aqsā Mosque, I dismounted from Burāq and tethered him to a hoop, which Gabriel showed me. All the Prophets had

tethered their mounts to this hoop. The souls of all the Prophets welcomed me with honor and respect.[4]

“When I saw these great souls, I asked the venerable Gabriel who they were. He said, ‘These are the Prophets and Messengers who preceded you. Salute them!’ 1 gave my salutation. As I entered the Aqsā Mosque, the signal to begin prayers was being recited. I looked to see who was giving this call, but Gabriel, on him be peace, conducted me to the prayer-niche, saying, ‘You must lead the prayers, for you are the most worthy and noble.’ I therefore went up to the niche and led all the Prophets and Messengers in performing a prayer of two cycles. Then I returned to face the Prophets, on them be peace, and conversed with them. All the glorious Prophets solemnly extolled Allāh, praising Him for the divine bounties He had bestowed upon them. I also extolled my Lord, recounting the gracious favors conferred on me by God, Exalted is He.

“Abraham, that special friend of Allāh, offered praise and said, ‘My Lord chose me as His special friend. He gave me great dominion. He mentioned me in His Qur’ān as being the father of your Community. He was kind to me and my son, sending down a ram as substitute for Ishmael. He proclaimed our glory to the whole world, having commanded me and my son, Ishmael, to build His Ka°ba, and mentioning our names in His Qur’ān and in the prayers made by you and your Community. For me, He turned Nimrod’s fiery furnace into light. By making me father to Isaac, he gave me the honor of being grandfather to all the Prophets. He destroyed by means of a mosquito that Nimrod who cast me into the fire.’

“Moses, the Converser, also offered words of praise, saying, ‘Praise and glory to Allāh, Exalted is He, for he spoke with me directly. He gave me the Torah. He drowned Pharaoh and his folk in the sea, delivering me and my people. He made Aaron my minister. He miraculously transformed my staff,

thereby chastising Pharaoh. He caused manna and quails to rain down on me and my people. Thus he gave thanks to Allāh for His grace and favor toward him.'

"The venerable Moses was followed by David, on him be peace, who said, 'Praise and glory to the Most Majestic and Exalted One, for He gave me great dominion and made me king. He gave me the Psalms. He conferred Prophethood on both me and my son. He caused iron to turn soft as wax in my hand. He made the mountains and the birds subject to me. He gave me a voice so sweet that those who heard it would swoon, while the hills and rocks would join me in remembering Allāh and glorifying Him. He granted me knowledge of Sacred Law and good judgment.'

"The venerable David was followed by his son, Solomon. He gave praise to Allāh, reciting the many bounties he had received, 'The All-Powerful and Self-Subsisting Lord gave me mastery of the winds, the jinn and the devils. I used to make them do my bidding. He taught me the language of birds and beasts. He preferred me over many of His servants and granted me a dominion mightier than anyone after me could attain.'

"As for Jesus, he offered thanks and praise in these words: 'Glory be to that Exalted Maker, for as He created Adam from dust, without mother or father, so did He bring me into being without a father and without matter, simply with the command: "Be!" He taught me the Torah and the Gospel and instructed me in knowledge of Sacred Law. In answer to my prayer, He healed the blind and the sick and restored the dead to life. He made me and my mother safe from the guile of Satan. He raised me alive to heaven.' For these and other bounties, he expressed his gratitude to Allāh, Exalted is He.

“Each Prophet-Messenger gave praise and thanks, enumerating the many bounties he had received. Then I said to them, ‘You have all praised and extolled the Lord of All Worlds for the blessings you have been given. Now let me tell you about the divine bounty I have received. That All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate, Self-Sufficing Lord of Majesty and Honor created my light from His own light. In my honor, He created the Throne, the Pedestal, Paradise, heaven and earth, all from my light. From my light He fashioned the sun and moon, the houries of Paradise with all their beauty, and also Adam. He sent me to all worlds, to all men and jinn, as a bringer of good tidings and as a warner. He made me a mercy to the whole universe. He sent me to all creatures as the final Prophet and Messenger. To me He revealed the Mighty Qur’ān. He made my Community the best of all communities. To me He explained everything contained in the Noble Qur’ān that He revealed to me, teaching me the sciences of the ancients and the modems. He made my Community the Community of the Middle way. He split open my breast and made me pure from sin. He exalted my name and title. He made me conqueror of all creatures and last of all Prophets. For me, He split the moon in half.’ When I had spoken, my ancestor Abraham said: ‘By this conquest and this finality you have become pre-eminent over all the Prophets.’ ”

According to a somewhat different version: The venerable Messenger of Allāh came at length to Jerusalem, where all the venerable Prophet-Messengers welcomed him with their greetings. They offered all manner of praises, showering him with light. Then they walked in front of Burāq as far as the Aqsā Mosque, where the Messenger, on him be peace, alighted. They stood by while Gabriel tethered Burāq. Then they addressed the Messenger, saying, “O Messenger of Allāh, enter the Mosque!” Our Master said to all the Prophets, “You were sent before me. It is more fitting that you should enter ahead of me.” But the Almighty Lord of all Worlds was heard to say, “O My beloved, your Mission is the last, but your light precedes all. They were all created from your light. It is right and proper that you should take precedence. Enter ahead of them all!”

The Messenger went in with Gabriel. Then all the Prophets entered the Aqsā Mosque in their wake. Gabriel gave the Call to Prayer, then signaled the start of the prayers. The Messenger led all the Prophets and the high angels present in performing a prayer of two cycles. He tells us, “When the prayer was over, I heard the inspiration: ‘Now it is time for supplication; make supplication for your Community.’ I held up my open palms toward the Exalted Court. I made humble supplication to my Lord, begging Him to save and deliver my poor Community, to pardon and forgive them, to save them from the fire of Hell and to admit them to Paradise. All the Prophet-Messengers and high angels, on them be peace, said ‘Amen’ to this prayer of mine. At that moment, I heard a voice within my heart, saying: ‘O My beloved, the place you are sitting in is the Aqsā Mosque. This is the Night of Ascension. You have made supplication as chief of the Prophets. The Messengers and angels have said ‘Amen’ to it. The One to whom you made that prayer is Allāh, Lord of Majesty and Bounty, the Most Merciful of the merciful, the most Generous of the most generous, who brings all into the light of His guidance. Your prayers have been accepted. The sins of your Community have been pardoned and hidden away. They will certainly be delivered from torment.

By virtue of My Might and Majesty, I have granted them My Mercy. I shall gladden them with the sight of My Beauty.’

“Paradise and bliss were bestowed on my Community that night.” (O Lord, let us die in faith. Gladden us with the vision of Your Beauty. Amen, O All-Merciful and Compassionate One, in honor of the chief of the Messengers.)

“When I came out from the Aqsā Mosque, the venerable Gabriel met me, holding three goblets in his hand. One contained milk, one wine, and the

other water. He said to me, ‘O Messenger of Allāh, take one of these three and drink!’ I chose the milk and drank it down. A drop was left and I gave it to Gabriel, on him be peace, who said, ‘You have chosen the natural disposition of Islam.’

“A voice called from the unseen, ‘O Muhammad, if you had drunk every drop of milk in the glass, not one member of your Community would have entered Hell.’ Turning to Gabriel, I asked him to let me drink the last drop of milk, but he said, ‘What has been destined from all eternity, what is written in the Mother of the Book must be fulfilled, O Messenger of Allāh! Then the Ascension began. I rode on Gabriel. We entered the first level of heaven and Gabriel knocked on the gate. ‘Who is there?’ said a voice from within. Said Gabriel, ‘It is I. Muhammad, on him be peace, is at my side.’—‘Has he been sent?’ said the voice, as we were admitted within. In this first level of heaven I saw a radiant being. He was looking to his right and laughing, then to his left and weeping. ‘Who is he?’ I asked, and Gabriel said, “That is Adam, on him be peace.’ I saluted him. ‘Welcome, my son and righteous Messenger,’ he replied. Then the venerable Gabriel explained, “When he looks to his right he is happy to see the Prophets, Messengers and righteous descendants stemming from him. But when he looks to his left, he weeps at the sight of his wicked and unbelieving offspring.’ ”

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THE PROPHET VISITS THE SEVEN HEAVENS

In the first level of heaven, all the angels greeted our Master, the Lord’s beloved, saying: “Welcome, O Ahmad! Welcome, beloved of Allāh!” Then

they turned to continue their worship, performing their remembrance and glorifications in a standing position.

Our Master continues his account: “On Gabriel’s wing, I rose to the second level of heaven. Gabriel knocked at the gate and the angel guarding it said: ‘Who are you? Who is that with you?’—‘I am Gabriel; Muhammad is at my side.’—‘Oh! Has God’s beloved arrived? Please come in!’ So saying, the angel opened the gate to the second heaven. Once inside, I saw the inhabitants of this second heaven performing their worship and glorification in a bowing posture. On seeing me, they all cried, ‘Welcome, Ahmad! Welcome, Mahmūd!’ They received me with honor, then returned to their worshipful bowing, glorifying the Lord of All Worlds in that position. Each had a different string of prayer-beads. Gabriel explained, The angels of the first level worship the Lord of All Worlds in a standing position, while those of the second level bow in worship.’ There I saw the venerable Jesus and the venerable John, on them be peace. ‘Welcome, our righteous brother Prophet!’ said they. Hundreds of thousands of angels were glorifying Allāh in these words: ‘Glory to Allāh! All praise and glory to Allāh, Most Magnificent! His forgiveness I beg!’[5]

“When we rose to the third heaven, I saw angels so numerous that only Allāh could tell their number. They were all in prostration before the Lord of All Worlds, glorifying Him in that posture. When they saw me they paid me honor and respect. Here I met the venerable Joseph and Solomon, on them be peace. They greeted me with, ‘Welcome, righteous brother Prophet!’ Here I witnessed many wonders.

“On rising to the fourth heaven, I found all its inhabitants glorifying Allāh upon their knees. Here I encountered the venerable Moses, the mother of the venerable Moses, Pharaoh’s wife Asiya and the venerable Mary. They all paid me honor and respect.

“We ascended to the fifth level of heaven. Innumerable angels were standing in worship, their gaze turned down toward their toes as they glorified the Lord God. They stood in calm humility. ‘Is this their mode of worship?’ I asked. Gabriel replied, ‘Yes, O Messenger of Allāh! They will worship and pray like this until the Resurrection. May the worship of all the angels become a religious duty for your Community.’ I made the same prayer. Here I met with the venerable Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Lot, on them be peace. They said, ‘Pray to your Lord. Beseech Him to lighten the load of your Community.’ I saw many marvels in this heaven.

“We rose up to the sixth level of heaven. Here, the angels were making remembrance of the Lord of All Worlds in calm humility. They greeted me with honor and respect. Here I encountered the venerable Idrīs and Noah. They turned to me and said, ‘Welcome, righteous brother Prophet!’

“On ascending to the seventh heaven, I saw countless angels. They hailed me with congratulations, greeting me with honor and respect. Here I met Abraham, who said, ‘O my righteous son and Prophet, welcome!’ He received me kindly and offered congratulations.

“From there, we went on to reach the Ultimate Lotus Tree. We were greeted by angels too many for all but Allāh to count. On seeing my beautiful countenance, they thanked Allāh and donated the rewards of their worship to my Community. They gave me good tidings and offered their congratulations. I asked Gabriel about the throngs of angels visiting the Prosperous House at the Ultimate Lotus Tree. ‘O Gabriel,’ said I, ‘how many times does one angel circumambulate this Prosperous House?’ He replied, ‘O Messenger of Allāh, once having made the circuit of this Prosperous House, an angel cannot circumambulate this place again. This

Prosperous House is the direction of prayer [qibla] for heaven. This is where congregational prayers are performed on Fridays. I deliver the sermon. Isrāfīl acts as Imām. Michael gives the Call to Prayer. °Azrā'īl signals the start of prayers. All the angels join the prayers. The reward for leading the prayers goes to the Imāms who lead the Friday prayers on earth. The reward for Michael's giving the Call to Prayer goes to the muezzins who give the Call to Prayer each Friday on earth. The reward for the signal to begin, given here by °Azrā'īl goes to those who give that signal each Friday on earth. As for the other angels, they say, 'O Lord, we donate the worship we have performed to those servants of Yours who perform Friday prayers on earth.' The Lord God says, 'You have generously donated the reward for your worship to the Community of Muhammad. I have gladdened them—those who perform the Friday prayers—with My pardon and forgiveness.' "

Our Master, the noble Messenger explains that here he was given three gifts: first, the five set prayers; second the last part of Sūrat al-Baqara; third, pardon for the major sins of the Community of Muhammad.

"I had asked that the worship performed by the angels might be made a religious duty for my Community. That would have meant an obligation for my Community to perform fifty set prayers. In answer to my plea, the number was reduced to five. Said Moses, on him be peace, 'O Muhammad, they will not even do these five. Go and beg your Lord for a further reduction.' But I replied, 'I am ashamed to ask my Lord again. If they are my Community, they will observe these five times.' Those who do these five prayers, calmly and humbly and at the proper times, have been granted the reward for fifty, as well as the reward of all the inhabitants of heaven.

"From the Ultimate Lotus Tree, I finally came to Paradise. Said the venerable Gabriel, 'O Messenger of Allāh, the Glorious and Exalted Lord is

venerating His own Essence.' 'What is He saying?' I asked. Gabriel explained, 'The Glorious and Exalted One says, "All-Glorious, All-Holy, Lord of Angels and of the Spirit, My mercy has outstripped My wrath."[6] We passed beyond the Ultimate Lotus Tree and Paradise. Said the venerable Gabriel, 'O Messenger of Allāh, this is my station. If I ascend higher than this, I shall burn. No creature but you may pass beyond this point.' I was made to mount Rafraf. 'Approach, approach!' came the command. On reaching the Throne, I wished to take off my shoes.' Said I, My Lord, you bade my brother Moses remove his sandals on Mount Sinai. That was on earth, while this is Your Throne.' But the Exalted One replied: My dearly be loved, he is My Converser, while you are my Beloved!' "

When the Messenger of Allāh ascended to heaven, the Pen said, "Muhammad is mine." The Tablet said, "He is Mine." The Throne, the Pedestal and Paradise each said, "Muhammad is mine." Then the Exalted One said: "My beloved, I have given you the Pen, the Tablet, the Throne, the Pedestal and Paradise." The blessed Messenger said, "My Lord, I do not wish for these. What I ask from You is my Community." Then the Lord of All Worlds said, "I have given you your Community."

Our Master reached the Two Bow-lengths. A sign was given to him, meaning, "Salute your Lord!" so our Master said:

"al-tahīyātu lillāhi wa-lsalawātu wa-ltayyibāt,"[7] and the noble Lord of All Worlds said:

"al-salāmu °alayka ayyuhā-lnabīyu wa-rahmatu-llāhi wa-barakātuh,"[8] to which our blessed Master immediately replied:

“al-salāmu °alaynāwa-°alā °ibādihi-lsālihīn.”[9] Then the listening angels said:

“ashhadu an lā ilāha illā-llāh wa-ashhadu anna Muhammadan °abduhu wa-rasūluh.”[10]

Allāh said kindly to our Master, “O My beloved, great indeed is the honor in which I hold you. Were there a hundred Thrones, the dust your foot has trodden would be dearer to Me than them all.” Then the Exalted One said, “My beloved, what gift have you brought for me?” Our Master said:

“Two gifts I have brought: one is the paucity of obedience, the other the multiplicity of sins and offenses committed by my Community.”

Said the Exalted Lord, “In my mercy, I have forgiven their paucity of obedience. Through your intercession and in your honor, I have also pardoned their multiplicity of sin.”

Our Master says, “Five complaints were made against my Community. Allāh said, ‘O Ahmad, although I do not ask your Community for tomorrow’s prayers today, they want tomorrow’s provisions from Me in advance. I cannot give their sustenance to another, yet they devote their actions to others than me. They enjoy My provision, yet give thanks to others than Me. Though disobeying Me they are obedient to others than Me. I created the Fire of Hell for unbelievers, yet they are asking to go there.’ ”

When our Master said, “My Lord, You gave Paradise to the venerable Adam,” the All Glorious One said, “I did give Paradise to Adam, then I expelled him from it. I shall give Paradise to you and your Community, but I shall never make them leave it.” The following exchanges then took place:

“My Lord, you gave the Ark to the venerable Noah. You granted salvation to those who took refuge in it. They used to worship in that Ark.”

“My beloved, I have made the whole world a mosque. Those who frequent the mosques, I have made immune to My fire. I shall make the mosques serve as arks until the Resurrection, then I shall use them to carry your Community across the Bridge over Hell.”

“My Lord, for the venerable Abraham You turned Nimrod’s fire into light. You made it harmlessly cool.”

“For your Community I shall cool the Fire of Hell.”

“My Lord, you gave Zamzam to the venerable Ishmael.”

“I have given you the River Kawthar.”

“You conversed with the venerable Moses on Mount Sinai.”

“I conversed with you above the Throne, at an even higher station.”

“You sent a meal down from heaven for the venerable Jesus.”

“I shall send meals from Paradise down to your Community at the Resurrection, when everyone else is starving, thirsty and naked.”

“To the venerable David You gave the Psalms.”

“To you I have given Sūrat al-An°ām[11].”

“You delivered Jonah from three kinds of darkness.”

“I shall also deliver your Community from three kinds of darkness: that of the tomb, that of the Resurrection and that of the Bridge. Each of these three stations is in darkness, but the faith of the believers will fill them with light.”

“My Lord, You gave the venerable Khidr the water of Life.” “To you and your Community I shall give the River Salsabīl.” “You gave the Gospel to the venerable Jesus.”

“To you, My beloved, I have given Sūrat al-Ikhlās[12].”

“You gave the Torah to the venerable Moses.”

“My beloved, I have given you the Throne Verse (Āyat al-Kursī). I have revealed to you a glorious Sūra which is not to be found in the Torah, nor the gospel, not in the Psalms nor in any of the hundred Scrolls. That Sūra is Sūrat al-Fātiha. Such is that glorious Sūra of Mine that Hell is forbidden to touch the body of anyone who recites it. Though his parents were unbelievers, I will abate their torment. In honor of that Sura, I have created no servant more noble than you, nor greater than you, nor finer than you. To read Sūrat al-An°ām is like reading the essence of the Psalms. To read Sūrat al-Ikhlās is like reading the essential truth of the Gospel. To read the Throne Verse is like reading the essential truth of the Torah.”

“My Lord, I have seen Your Paradise with all its cities, palaces, splendid pavilions, houries, attendants and pages, its satin, silks and brocades and its thrones adorned with gold, silver, rubies, pearls, and emeralds. I have seen the houries, whose beauty defies description. I have seen crowns of light and robes of light. To which of Your Messengers do all these belong?”

“My beloved, these do not belong to the Prophets. Bounties by the hundreds of thousands have been prepared for My believing servants. These bounties of Mine will belong to any member of your Community who says, with sincere belief, ‘I testify that there is no god but Allāh and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.’ ”

When our Master reached the Throne on High, he placed his right hand on his left and stood humbly to make a request. The Glorious and Exalted One said, “O Muhammad, O Muhammad, ask of Me whatever you wish. What

is it that you need of Me?" Our Master then said, "My Lord, what I ask of you is nearness to my Community." Allāh replied:

"For the sake of My majesty, I also wish to be near to your Community. I shall not put the unbelievers in My Paradise. I have prepared My mercy and My bounty for the believers. Those who wish for My approval must beautify their tongues with remembrance of Me. Let them obey Me as they grow toward physical maturity. Let them devote their lives to My cause. In token of their loving dedication, let them hear no words but Mine and let their hearts harbor no love for anything but Me. Let their tongues affirm My Unity. Let their bodies stand in worship and let their eyes be moist with love and fear of Me. Then, I shall be close to them in both worlds and I shall keep the devil far away from them. I shall employ them eternally in services pleasing to Me. My help and guidance will go with them always."

Our Master said, "My Lord, the members of my Community are weak. They will not be capable of doing all these things. You are the source of divine generosity. You are All-Merciful; You are All-Compassionate."

The Lord said, "O My Beloved, I am the Most Merciful of the Merciful; I am the King; I neither profit by anyone's obedience, nor suffer harm from the disobedience of any sinner. Good news and congratulations to those who say, 'I testify that there is no god but Allāh, and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.' My mercy is theirs without charge. On them I confer My noble approval. Those servants of Mine enjoy My bounty and favor everlastingly."

Said our Master, the Glory of the Universe, "O Lord, my soul has now achieved bliss; my spirit and my heart are at peace; my breast is calm and I

am content, O my Lord!” Then God, Exalted is He, the Most Generous of the Most Generous, said:

Your Lord shall give you, and you shall be satisfied. [93:5]

The Lord of Beauty then said to His beloved, our Master, “My beloved, you are dearer to me than all the Prophets. Because your Community is also dearer to me than all other communities, I have combined the acts of worship of all the inhabitants of Heaven and called them Ritual Prayer. I have made this prayer a religious obligation for your Community. Any member of your Community who performs this obligation to please Me will have worshipped Me with all acts of worship.”

This Prayer is the pillar of our religion; this Prayer is the light of our Master’s eye; this Prayer is the form of worship most pleasing to Allāh. True lover, if you acknowledge Allāh, if you love the Messenger and believe in Him, then perform this Prayer and enter Paradise! ...

Our Master says, “Hell was displayed before me. I saw that the majority of its inhabitants were women, rich people and people without worship. When I asked the venerable Gabriel the reason for this, he explained:

“The women are there because they disobeyed their husbands and were ungrateful for the benefits they provided. The rich people are there because they were not thankful for their goods and did not pay the alms-due or give in charity, while those deficient in worship deserve to be in Hell because instead of serving God, they sinned against Him.”

THE FOUR RIVERS & THE “TWO BOW-LENGTHS”

Our Master continues: “During my Ascension, I saw a dome of light. Four rivers issued from this dome. One of these rivers was of water, one of honey, one of wine and the other of milk. These four rivers flowed, bubbling, from that dome of light. Gabriel said to me: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, would you not like to see the source of these rivers?’ When I said: ‘Yes’, the dome opened up. Inscribed within it was the sentence:

Bismillāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate.

“The River of Water flowed from the Arabic Letter “M” in the word bismi-llāh, the River of Honey from the “H,” the River of Milk from the hole in the center of the Arabic letter “M” in rahmān and the River of Wine from the hole in the center of the “M” in rahīm. When I said, ‘Who will drink from these rivers, Gabriel?’, the reply came from the Exalted Lord, ‘O Muhammad, if any member of your Community mentions Me by My names and says: Bismillāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm with sincere intention, then, on the Day of Resurrection, I shall allow that servant of mine to drink from these rivers while everyone else goes thirsty. O Muhammad, if any member of your Community makes ablution and says, “There is no god but Allāh,” for the sake of My Majesty, I shall give that servant of mine a Paradise as great as this world.’ ”

Our Master reached the Two Bow-lengths. There he saw a huge chest made of light, on which there was a lock, also made of light. Our Master said, “My Lord, what does this great chest of light contain? I would like to see. Where is the key to it?” The Lord of Glory said:

“O My Messenger, the key to it is in you. It opens with, ‘There is no god but Allāh, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.’ ” Our Master then made this affirmation of Divine Unity and the box opened. An infinite ocean was visible within it. Within that ocean, there was a bird and on the bird’s claw was a piece of mud. In answer to the question: “My Lord, what do these things represent?” The Lord said:

“My beloved, that infinite sea is My Mercy; that bird is your Community; the mud on the bird’s claw represents the sins committed by your Community. Compared to My Mercy their sin is no greater than the mud on that bird’s claw. You have seen the ocean of My Mercy and you have also seen the sins of your Com munity. When set against the ocean of My Mercy, their sins are no greater than an atom. Just as a bit of mud will disappear if it falls into the sea, their offenses are as nothing compared to My Mercy. I am the Most Merciful of the Merciful; I am All-Forgiving; All-Generous.”

According to Imām °Alī, the blessed Messenger said, “On the Night of my Ascension, I asked Allāh, ‘What action is dearest to You?’ The Lord of Majesty replied: ‘O Ahmad, the most meritorious of all actions and the one dearest in my sight is that of entrusting everything to me. O Ahmad, no action is higher than being content with what I have given. I love those who are content with Me; I love those who love one another for My sake, and I love those who bring people to Me.’ I said, ‘My Lord, teach me an action by means of which I may draw close to You.’ The Exalted One said, ‘Spend your nights in worship and your days in fasting; worship Me in lonely

places. I shall admit to Paradise any servant of Mine who possesses three qualities. Paradise belongs to that servant of Mine who remembers Me with his tongue, does not forget Me in his heart and consumes lawful food. To love those I love is the same as loving Me. Those who love Me are content. They endure affliction with patience and are grateful for My bounty. They do not lie, but keep their commitments and are true to their promises. They do not disobey Me. Losing a benefit does not make them sad, nor does acquiring a benefit make them unduly happy. They depend upon Me in all circumstances. O Ahmad, be close to the poor and keep your distance from tyrants! Let your Affection be for the Hereafter!'

"When I asked, 'Who are the tyrants, my Lord?' He replied:

" 'They are those who sleep a lot and are often angry; they are those who are not content with little; they are those who do not apologize when they harm somebody; they are those who do not recognize the truth or acknowledge the rights of others; they are those who refuse their pardon when it is sought; they are those who are lazy when it is time for worship; but full of vigor when it comes to sin; they are those too ambitious to remember that they are only mortals; they are those who do not treat people well; they are those who show no respect to their elders and seniors and have no compassion for their juniors. O my beloved Ahmad, the servants I love are those who have smiling faces, who are modest and in whom the good far outweighs the bad. They are true to their word and their hearts are awake. They call themselves to account, their eyes are moist from love of Me and their tongues are engaged in remembrance of Me. When they consume My bounties, they offer Me their praise and thanks. The prayers and appeals of these servants of Mine are acceptable in My sight. When they get up to pray to Me, they stand like fortresses of steel. They do not concern themselves with anything but Me. Though their hands may be busy with work, their hearts are always with Me. Such people eat only lawful food and clothe themselves lawfully. They guard their honor and virtue

from all that is forbidden. For the sake of My Majesty and glory, I shall give this group eternal life.’

“ ‘When their time comes, I shall take their souls to Myself. I shall not send °Azrā’īl to take them. I shall not allow anyone but Myself to take their souls. I shall open the gate of the heart to their dear and precious spirits. They will enter my Paradise, where My houries, attendants and pages will greet them with the fruits and garments of Paradise.

“ ‘I shall make them fragrant with sweet perfumes from My Throne. Between these servants of Mine and Me, no veil is drawn. O Ahmad, this is how I shall treat My beloved servants at the Resurrection: when all my creatures arise from their graves and make their way to the Place of Resurrection, quarreling, settling accounts and trailing on the ground, My obedient and beloved servants will be safe from all fear beneath the Throne. I shall give them all the keys of Paradise. They may enter Paradise by any gate they choose. Not for an instant will they be deprived of My Beauty. For them I shall open four gates of Paradise. Through one of these, My gifts will come to them by night and day. Through the second they will look upon Me. They will have a clear and unrestricted view of My Beauty. Through the third gate, they will see Hell, witnessing the condition of the tyrants who wronged them in the world. Through the fourth gate, the houries will come to do them honor.’

“I said, ‘My Lord, which of Your servants are these?’ The Lord replied, These are My servants who worship neither because of their longing for Paradise, nor from fear of My Hell. These servants of Mine worshipped Me purely for My sake and to please Me. To please Me, they refused to follow their lower natures. It is to these servants of Mine that I shall grant these bounties.’”

Our Master, the Glory of Adam and Pride of the Universe, made this supplication to the Most Merciful of the Merciful on behalf of his Community: “My God, pardon my Community! Look mercifully upon them! Grant them perfect faith! Do not let them fall from faith into doubt and uncertainty! Give them no cause to fear! Let them not be heedless! Give them knowledge, not ignorance! Give them intelligence! Let them not be slaves to their selfish desires! Bring them close to the Essence of Divinity! Do not drive them from Your door! Adorn their tongues with your Qur’ān! Let them not forget Your Essence! Make them patient and steadfast! My Lord, make my Community modest! Make them safe from the perils of the soul and from the temptations of this world and the Hereafter!”

The Glorified and Exalted Lord then said to our Master, “O Ahmad, to beware of doubt is the beginning and end of religion. Worship has ten parts: eating lawful food accounts for nine of those parts and silence is the other. I develop the hearts of those who observe silence, while I wreck the hearts of those who talk too much. Do you know the reward due to a servant of Mine if he fasts and keeps silent to please Me?”

Our Master said, “My Lord, I do not know.” So the Exalted One explained:

“The reward for fasting, keeping silence and not talking too much is wisdom. The legacy of wisdom is esoteric knowledge. The end of esoteric knowledge is closeness to Me. I have three rewards for anyone who conducts himself to please Me and to earn My divine approval:

i. I shall teach him such knowledge that no ignorance will remain in him.

ii. I shall give him such intelligence that no forgetfulness will remain in him.

iii. I shall give him such affection that he will love nothing other than Me.

“That servant of Mine will have his heart so full of My love that there will be no space in it for any other. I love those who Love Me. I also cause them to love My servants. I make them kings of the heart.

“In the heart of that servant of Mine, I shall open a gate through which he will behold My Beauty and hear My speech. I shall teach that servant such secrets of Mine as no one else knows. I shall dress that servant in the robe of modesty. All people will defer to him. I shall make that servant’s heart a treasure house of esoteric knowledge. I shall reveal to him the mysteries of Paradise and Hell. There will be no reckoning for him on the Day of Resurrection. I shall not have him interrogated in the tomb by Munkar and Nakīr. I shall ask no one to be interpreter between that servant and Myself. He will discuss everything with Me. He will cross the Bridge like lightning. I shall not let that servant see Hell. For that servant, I shall beautify My Paradise. I shall put that servant of Mine in my Paradise, along with the Prophets and martyrs.

“Let all my servants refrain from loving My enemies, if they wish to attain this bounty and enter Paradise without interrogation or reckoning. Let them not sit in the company of My foes. Let them await their appointed time, worshipping and obeying Me and giving Me their love. Let them worship Me until they die. I shall take away the souls of My servants who act like this, as easily and smoothly as one removes a hair from butter. When one of

them dies, I shall send angels to get him; those angels will give that servant of Mine the water of Kawthar and the wine of Paradise. They will not let Satan near him. Having drunk the wine of Paradise, he will not feel the pangs of death. They will set his soul down on the right side of the Throne. When they ask that servant of Mine:

‘How did you leave the world? How did it come about?’ he will say.

‘I do not know how it happened. I was given a bowl of the wine of Paradise and I did not feel the pain of death. However, I have feared Allāh since He created me. I had no love for the lower world. I never sat in the company of the enemies of Allāh. He must have granted me this favor because I always enjoyed His approval. He kept me from feeling the agony of death.’ ”

Then the Exalted One will say, “What My servant says is true. His body was on earth, but his heart was with Me.” Addressing His servant, He will say, “My special servant, ask of Me whatever you wish, that I may grant it.” That person will say, “My Lord, even if they tore me to bits seventy times a day, I would be content to please You.”

My God, without Your grace, we shall perish. We have no escape from grief. Unless You help us, who will give us aid? We are weak unless You give us strength. Unless You revive us with Your remembrance, we are dead.

Said the most noble Messenger, “My Lord, how can I earn Your noble approval?”

The Exalted One replied, “My beloved, between you and Me, no veil is drawn. Come to Me whenever you wish. O Muhammad, do you know why I created you superior to the other Prophets?”

When the Messenger said, “My Lord, I do not know,” the Lord said, “Your being is very beautiful to me. Your beautiful character, your generosity, your humility and your compassion for my servants are the reason why I love you more than the other Prophets. Because of these qualities of yours, I have made you superior to them all.

“My beloved, let Me tell you about the joy of faith, then you tell My servants! Let them fast and refrain from too much talk. Let them prefer silence. Let their hearts be one. Let them fear Me and love you. If they behave like this, they will discover the joy of faith. If they act in this way, they will be safe from My torment.” Our Master relates that the Glorious Lord said, “If a servant of Mine is smitten with love of Me and if he bears this affliction patiently, Paradise is his reward. If a servant longs to meet Me, I also long to encounter that servant. If a servant does not wish to meet Me, I have no wish to meet that servant.”

Our Master also relates that Allāh said, “When the Day of Resurrection comes, I shall take issue with three types of people:

i. Those who do good to someone to please Me, but then wrong that person by taunting him with the favor done,

ii. Those who sell an emancipated slave and consume the price, or who enslave free men;

iii. Those who do not give people their due for work performed."

According to our Master, Allāh will say to a servant on the Day of Resurrection, "I became ill, but you did not come to ask how I was." That servant will reply, "My Lord, You are the Lord of All Worlds. How could you fall ill?" but the Lord will say: "My servant so-and-so became sick; if you had visited him, you would have visited Me, for by doing so you would have pleased Me."

The Exalted One said, "My servants, without My guidance, you would all be left in error. I am the Provider. It is I who feed you. Ask Me for guidance and provision, that I may give them to you. I created you from clay. Ask me for clothing and I shall clothe you.

"My servants, you sin and disobey Me night and day. Repent to Me that I may pardon you. Ask Me for forgiveness that I may forgive you. Be obedient to Me, all of you, the first and the last, men and jinn. There is nothing superfluous in my Kingdom. If you are disobedient, nothing will be lacking from My Kingdom. For My devout and righteous servants, I have created bounties in Paradise, such as no eyes ever saw and no ears ever heard of. The human mind cannot conceive of them. These bounties can be comprehended only when they are seen and tasted. Only then will they be appreciated."

Our Master says, “On that night I begged my Lord for my Community seven hundred times and my Lord gave me my Community. He promised Paradise and its beauty to my Community. That night, my Community attained divine pardon and grace.”

Our Master said, “When, by divine decree, I came back to the house of the venerable Umm Hāni’, my bed was still warm. Time had been created within time and space within space. Thus did my Lord show me His favor toward my Community that night.

“I saw a pavilion in Paradise, made of red ruby. ‘My Lord’, I said, ‘to which Prophet does this pavilion belong?’ and He said, ‘This pavilion does not belong to any Prophet. If a member of your Community takes a blind man by the arm and leads him a few steps, I shall present him with this pavilion.’ ”

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As for those unbelievers who had insulted and abused our Master that day, they were all afflicted with some agony. The souls of some of them went to Hell at the Battle of Badr. In fact, all who despise our Master, the Lord’s beloved, will certainly suffer some incurable affliction or else die like animals and enter the fire of Hell.

Five Tragic Deaths

Five of the insolent polytheists of Quraysh met with tragic deaths. Instead of acknowledging our Master's Prophethood, they always mocked, ridiculed, reviled and abused him. These are the names of the accursed five: °Ās ibn Wā°il al-Sahmī, Aswad ibn Matlab, Aswad ibn°Abd Yaghūth, Walīd ibn Mughīra and Hārith ibn Qays.

One day, our Master was sitting in the Sacred Mosque. Allāh's mighty angel Gabriel was by his side. By divine leave, the angels were always guarding our Master. These five scoundrels came by. Gabriel, on him be peace, pointed to the sole of °Ās's foot, to Aswad's eyes, to Yaghūth's head, to Walīd's foot and to Hārith's belly. Then he said to the noble Prophet, "Good news, O Messenger of Allāh! Allāh has delivered you from the mischief of these wicked men. After today they will be unable to prosper."

The next day, each of the five met a tragic end. °Ās was riding with his two sons in the hills around Mecca, when he fell from his horse. A thorn pierced his foot and he began to wail, crying, "Oh, I have been bitten by a snake!" There was nothing to indicate whether the wound had been caused by a thorn or by a snakebite. Nevertheless, °Ās worked himself into a sweat. He was starting to suffer, in this world, the torment for having insulted our Master. As the day progressed, his foot began to swell. It became as swollen as a camel's hump. He was being punished for what he had done. Had things gone no further, all would have been well and good. He realized why his foot was in that condition. "Muhammad's Lord has killed me," he said. But he was too arrogant to come to faith. The polytheists of Mecca would find fault with him, if they heard he had become a believer. He was well aware that our Master, the tender and compassionate beloved of Allāh, could cure his agony, if only he would believe and seek refuge with him. But oh, that arrogant pride ...

To plead with a man he had been accustomed to mocking, cursing and reviling ... This would have been even more agonizing to him than the torment he was suffering now. He died writhing in pain and tumbled into Hell.

As for Aswad ibn Matlab, the second of the accursed five, he was sitting in the shade of a tree on the outskirts of Mecca, when suddenly his eyes—already close to the truth—went blind. An angel came and started banging his head against that tree. Aswad could see the angel who was doing this to him, though it was invisible to the slaves he had with him. He begged his slaves to help him, crying, “Mercy! Save me from these hands. Rescue me. I shall set you free.” The slaves took hold of Aswad, but they could not prevent him from banging his head on the tree. There was no escape for Aswad. That arrogant unbeliever also said: “Muhammad’s Lord has killed me,” but it never crossed his mind to have faith and to seek the pardon of our Master, the most glorious Messenger. Had he taken refuge with the Chosen Messenger, he could have spared himself this torment and attained bliss in the Hereafter.

Was there any likelihood of that? He would have to suffer the penalty for the mischief he had done! He had sold his afterlife for the fleeting life of this world, deceiving himself that his property and power would last forever. He was also hurled into Hell, to undergo his punishment. His torment would be everlasting.

Yaghūth, the third accursed one, was out in Mecca on business when the simoom wind caught him. He was scorched from head to toe. He faced painful torment while still in this world. When he got home, his family did not recognize him; they shut him out of the house. He looked like a pig.

“I am Yaghūth,” he cried, “I live here. You are my children.”

“No!” replied the people inside. “We do not know you. You are not our father. Go back where you came from!” As he tried to get into his house, he beat his head repeatedly against the door, saying, “Muhammad’s Lord has put me in this state.” He met his fate and went to Hell.

As for Hārith ibn Qays, he ate salted fish. A strange thirst overpowered him. Usually, a drink of water would cool him down after eating salted fish, but this time it seemed as if he had the fire of Hell in his stomach. Far from cooling down, he got thirstier and thirstier the more water he drank.

He drank and he drank ...

He could neither quench his thirst nor get rid of all the water he had drunk. The exit from his bladder seemed blocked. But his thirst still raged. He went on drinking, only to find his thirst intensified. At last he understood. Like the others, he said, “Muhammad’s Lord is killing me.” Then he burst. He had been unable to plead for intercession from our Master, the most glorious Messenger. He paid the penalty, was hurled into Hell and faced eternal torment.

The despicable Walīd ibn Mughīra was cursed like the other four. As he was passing a bow-maker’s one day, an arrowhead pierced his foot. A group of women were standing there. Perhaps he would not stoop to remove the metal from his foot in the presence of the women; maybe he considered it unmanly to attach importance to such trifles. He was proud of his manhood. But this was no ordinary arrow. Although he had naturally not realized this

yet, his deeds had come to an end. The respite his Lord had given him was terminated. His foot pained him so badly that the hills of Mecca echoed with his agonized cries. The local children mimicked and made fun of him. He scratched at the ground and tore his bedding to shreds, saying, “Muhammad’s Lord is killing me.” But it did not even cross his mind to have faith.

This arrogant man, so conceited about his manliness, was now ready to beg all comers for help; yet he was ashamed to turn for a cure to the Owner of heaven and earth and His beloved. The soul of this arrogant infidel was also consigned to the prison of Hell. His “Ah’s” and his “Oh’s” were heard no more.

Our story is confirmed by this verse of the Qur’ān:

Surely We are enough for you against the scoffers [15:95].

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Noah’s Son Prefers Not to be Restored to Life

By Allāh’s leave, the venerable Jesus used to bring the dead to life. His people said, “It is all very well for you to restore to life those who have died only recently.” Then, pointing to the ancient tomb where the son of the venerable Noah lay buried, they said, “Bring him back to life! Then we shall believe in you.” The venerable Jesus made a prayer of supplication.

The tomb burst open and a man with a white beard emerged from it, saying, “At your service!”

“Who are you?” asked the venerable Jesus.

“I am Noah’s son.”

“Your hair and beard had not turned white in your lifetime.”

“When I heard the command: Arise!’ I thought the Resurrection had begun. O Jesus, it has been thousands of years, but I can still feel the agony of death.”

“If you wish to live again, I shall pray that you may do so,” said the venerable Jesus, but he went back into his tomb, saying:

“No, Jesus! So painful is the agony of death, I have no wish to go through it again, after living and dying anew.”

Do not waste your time! Work, that you may prosper in both this world and the Next! Your father planted; you have enjoyed the harvest. Now it is your turn to plant, so that your children may eat!

A Quick Crop!

Harūn al-Rāshīd was once walking through a plantation, when he saw a hunched old graybeard putting in sapling date palms. He greeted him, saying, “Take it easy, father!”

“Thank you, my son,” the old man replied.

“What are you doing, father?” asked the Caliph.

“As you see, I am planting sapling date palms.”

“How many years does it take a date palm to bear fruit?”

“Ten, twenty, thirty years ... Some take as long as a hundred years.”

“Will you be able to eat the fruit of these palms you are planting?”

“I may not live to see the day,” said the old man, “but we eat from those our forebears planted. So let us plant, that those who follow us may eat in turn!” His words surprised the Caliph, who tossed him a purse of money. The old man took the gold pieces, saying:

“I give praise to Allāh, for the saplings I planted have borne fruit immediately!” The Caliph was pleased to hear him say this and he gave him another purse of gold. Said the old man:

“I give praise to Allāh, for trees normally bear fruit only once a year, but mine have produced two crops in one year!” Throwing him yet another purse of gold, the Caliph turned to the servant at his side and said:

“Quick, let us get away from here before this old man leaves us penniless.” And off they went.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF MADNESS

If you have done good, you will get the reward for it; if you have done evil, you will suffer the painful consequences. Believers, if we lived for a thousand years, the end would be death and dust ... Six feet of earth will suffice for those, like Alexander and Darius, who found this world too small for them. Not even the insane can deny the truth of my words.

There are many kinds of madness. Some are crazy about status, some about women, some about money, some about goods, some about property, some about rank, some about animals, some about people and some about the Truth. The last mentioned are the only kind worth knowing, for all the rest will leave you in the lurch ...

A Madman Offers A Recipe

A true spiritual guide once passed by a mental hospital. For the instruction of one of the doctors there, he threw out the question:

“Clever doctor, is there a cure for the disease of sin; is there a remedy for love and longing?” While the doctor was wondering how to answer, one of his mental patients offered to give a reply. Having obtained the doctor’s permission, the lunatic gave the following answer to the teacher’s question:

“You want to know the remedy for the disease of sin and the cure for the pain of love and longing, so listen! Mix the root of repentance with the leaf of prayer for forgiveness; grind them in the mortar of the heart with the pestle of the affirmation of Divine Unity; put the mixture through the sieve of moderation; moisten with tears of sincerity and cook on the fire of love. Wait with patience and forbearance till the long cooking process is complete, then eat with the spoon of contentment. The first part of this paste is medicine for the pain of sin, while the remainder is the cure for love and longing. This love and longing will take you to the Messenger. Union with the pure Messenger will lead you to meeting the All-Merciful, to divine approval and to the beauty of the Lord.”

The spiritual guide had asked, and the madman had replied. The doctor received instruction, discovered the remedy for his spiritual pain and achieved bliss in both worlds.

THE PROPHET’S GIFTS TO HIS LORD

It is related that the Exalted One asked, “What gift have you brought me, O messenger, My Muhammad?” This was the reply from our Master, the Lord’s beloved, the intercessor of the two worlds:

“My Lord, in one hand I hold the paucity of obedience on the part of my Community. They have not worshipped Your Most Glorious Essence properly. They have failed to give due thanks to Your Essence of Divinity for all Your grace and generosity toward them. These shortcomings of theirs, I have brought as a gift to Your Essence of Majesty. In my other hand, I hold sin and disobedience. They have failed to acknowledge You truly and to remember You truly. My Lord, insufficient for Your Most Glorious and Exalted Essence are Your servants’ knowledge of how to worship You properly, their recognition of You as You deserve, their submissiveness and gratitude for the benefits You have given them, their knowledge and practice of the remembrance due to You. I declare You exempt from attributes of deficiency; I ascribe to You the attributes of perfection.”

“O My beloved,” said Allāh, the Most Merciful of the merciful, the Most Generous of the generous, “I am All-Forgiving to all My creatures. I am Oft-Forgiving; I am All-Merciful; I am Compassionate. It is because of My love of you that I am particularly Tender and Compassionate towards your Community. Just as I hold you superior to the other Prophets, so do I prefer your Community over other communities. For you, I mercifully pardon the paucity of their worship and their shortcomings in My service. Through your intercession, I have also pardoned and forgiven their sins and disobedience. In your honor, I have received you to give you this good news.”

ALL VEILS REMOVED

When our Master reached the Two Bow-lengths, he saw his Lord whichever way he looked. His Lord was beyond all directions; this was how the manifestation occurred. The vision was complete. There was no veil, for the veil had been removed. When our Master reached his station, he did not want to leave it. Be\cause he had forgotten the existence of the self and of creatures, all barriers of association having disappeared, he wished to remain at that station and there to worship the Irresistible Lord in that state. In other words, when he beheld the beauty of Allāh, he became so intoxicated and bewildered that he forgot the world and all it contained, wishing to remain at that station forever in devoted service. But the Exalted One said:

“My Messenger, you are My herald and warner, I sent you to the world as a Messenger. You are there to invite the people to Me. I gave the good news of you to Adam, Moses, Jesus and all the other Prophets and Messengers. All mankind is awaiting your coming, your call, this grace of Mine which you have seen on your Ascension, and My good tidings of pardon and forgiveness. This station is truly a very exalted one. I never saw fit to bring to this station any other Prophet or Messenger of Mine, nor any of the angels—not even those near the Throne. Only you have I considered worthy of this affection and generosity of Mine. If you stay here, at this station, you will be unable to convey the Message and call the people to Me. This station is your station of Closeness to Me. In order to call the people to Me, you must now return to your station of Mission. Go back to the world. Wherever you stand to pray to Me, I will cause you to witness this station here; I shall grant you the state of bliss that you have tasted in it. You will even see Me completely. I shall remove the veil for you.”

Whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allāh. [2:115]

That night, all Paradise was presented to our Master; its houries and pavilions were displayed. Everything was shown to the Most Noble Prophet: Hell and its torments, this world and the Next, all that exists in every region, the things mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, whatever has been or will be. The end of Sūrat al-Baqara[13] was revealed to our Master, that beloved of the Lord, without intermediary.[14]

The Exalted One said to His refined beloved: "O Ahmad, My Messenger, I shall not install My other Prophets in my Paradise until you have entered there. Till then, it is forbidden to all the Prophets and Envoys, as it is to the other communities before your Community has entered ... That is to say, you and your Community will enter My Paradise first, then the other Messengers and their communities go in."

ASCENSIONS OF EARLIER MESSENGERS

Every Messenger made an Ascension, but none of them was like the Ascension of Allāh's beloved ...

The venerable Noah's Ascension was when his Community took refuge in the ark, the believers being saved from drowning, while those without faith were destroyed.

The venerable Abraham's Ascension occurred when he was cast into Nimrod's fiery furnace and it became a rose garden for the venerable friend of Allāh.

The venerable Jonah’s Ascension was in the belly of the whale.

The venerable Moses’ Ascension was during a thousand and one conversations on Mount Sinai.

The Lord’s beloved, the intercessor of Judgment Day, our Master, the Seal of the Prophets, experienced a hundred and more Ascensions in the spirit and one Ascension in body and spirit together, when he was transported from the Ka°ba to Jerusalem and thence into the heavens. He was shown all that ever happened on earth and all that is to be; all that has happened in the tomb and all that will happen there; all that will occur at the Resurrection, the Reckoning, the Balance, the Bridge, Hell and Paradise; the depths of Hell and the degrees of Paradise on high, the houries, attendants and pages, the angels of Paradise, the various torments that will occur in Hell and the severity of its wardens ...

In the course of his Ascension, our Master was shown the mercy, pardon and generosity of the Exalted Lord toward the Community of Muhammad, His kindness, grace and splendid beauty. He was shown the wet and the dry and whatever is to be. On his Ascension he was shown the meaning of the Qur’ān as it was revealed to him. On his Ascension our Master was given direct spiritual experience; he was granted Certainty of Knowledge, Certainty of Vision, and Certainty of Truth; the mysteries of sin, ancient and modern, esoteric and exoteric, were all revealed to him.

All that lies behind the veil, all dealings between man and God, between creature and Creator, reached completion. For the Community of Muhammad, the five set prayers had also become an Ascension. The mystery of the Ascension can be revealed within the believer who performs

the prayer, through various manifestations in accordance with his constitution and capacity.

COMPLETENESS OF OUR MASTER'S ASCENSION

The Ascension common to all of the Prophets is Certainty of Knowledge, that is, certainty through hearing.

As for the Ascension of our Master, the noble Lord of the Ascension, it combines Certainty of Knowledge, Certainty of Vision, and Certainty of Truth. In other words, our Master's Ascension did not stop at hearsay, nor even at the Ascension with his blessed eyes, for he attained the Ascension of direct experience involving body and heart, soul and spirit, inner and outer ears and eyes, external taste and spiritual taste.

Believers who attain the bounty of performing the prayer are not content with hearsay alone. If they stop at Certainty of Knowledge, it means they are heirs to the Ascension of the other Prophets. As for those lovers who are heirs to the Ascension of our Master, the Lord's beloved, in their Prayer-Ascension, they achieve various divine manifestations in keeping with their respective capacities, attaining the inner and outer bounties which our Master heard, saw, tasted and experienced in his heart, with his body, in soul or in spirit ... The manifestations are not limited or finite.

Allāh, make us heirs to this Ascension of Your Messenger! Let us taste the experience of the Prophets and saints of Allāh. Separate manifestations occur for each believer who makes an Ascension, that is to say, performs the prayer. Some believers make their Ascensions to the walls of the

mosque, some to the Ka°ba, some to the Prosperous House, some to the Throne, some to the Footstool and some toward God.

The Exalted One manifests Himself to them without direction, voice, word or sound. He converses with them voicelessly, soundlessly without direction or word. In fact, Allāh draws so close to these individuals that the eyes by which they see, the hands by which they hold, the tongues by which they speak and the feet with which they walk come to be together with God.

Just as our Master's journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, in body and spirit together, is referred to explicitly in a Qur'ānic Verse, his Ascension to heaven from Jerusalem is also confirmed by the Qur'ān. Sūrat al-Najm[15] is the proof of this. The Noble Qur'ān mentions that Solomon traveled the distance of a three-month journey between the times of noon and afternoon prayers. Naturally not in a dream but in body and spirit together.

To Solomon We made the wind subject; its morning course was a month's journey, and its evening course a month. And We made to flow for him a fountain of molten brass. And of the jinn, some worked before him by the permission of his Lord; and such of them as swerved from Our command, We gave them a taste of the torment of the blaze. [34:12]

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Our Master, the Messenger, did not make the Ascension himself. It was a favor bestowed upon him by the All-Glorious Lord. Allāh is capable of all things.

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Allāh’s greatest gift and most generous favor to us is Muhammad Mustafā. Praise be to Allāh, we have become his community, we have achieved everlasting bliss. My Lord, do not deprive us of this happiness. Amen, in honor of the chief of the Messengers and praise be to Allāh, Lord of All Worlds ...

O Allāh! O All Generous One! O All-Compassionate One! ... My God, remove from our hearts the cares of this world! Crown us with your love and affection! Let us travel the road that leads to You, O my Lord! Gladden our sad hearts, deliver us all from the fire and increase our love and affection for You and your beloved, O my Lord!

O my Lord, let the Night of the Ascension be fortunate and blessed for all of us, by joining our prayers to those accepted at the Resting Place.

In honor of the Chief of the Messengers ... and in honor of Tāhā and Yāsīn and the people of Yāsīn; and praise be to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds ...

NOTES

[1]And he who brings the truth, and he who veraciously confirms it—such are the dutiful” [39:33].

[2]According to the majority of scholars it was a Thursday, the 26th of Rajab, in the ninth year of the Prophethood of the Messenger, on him be peace.

[3]wa-la-sawfa yu°tīka rabbuka [93:5]

[4]According to certain scholars, Allāh, Glorious is He, brought all the Prophets bodily to life, in honor of the noble Messenger.

[5]Anyone in difficult straits will find his difficulties eased if he recites this glorification one hundred times, between the customary and obligatory morning prayers.

[6]subbūhun quddūsun rabbu-lmalā’ikati wa-lrūh sabaqat rahmati °alā ghadabī

[7]“Greetings, supplications, acts of worship, all pure and beautiful things, praise and thanks are due to Allāh alone.”

[8]“Upon you, My revered Prophet, be My grace, My mercy and My peace!”

[9]“O Lord, let Your peace, Your grace and Your mercy be not upon me alone, but upon all Your righteous servants.”

[10]"We testify that there is no god but Allāh. We testify that Muhammad is the servant and Messenger of Allāh."

It has been said that if our Master had not specified righteous servants, parsley would have grown in Hell.

[11]Chapter 6 of the Qur'ān

[12]Chapter 112 of the Qur'ān

[13]Second chapter of the Qur'ān

[14]The revelations were normally communicated by way of Gabriel, on him be peace.

[15]Chapter 53 of the Qur'ān

THE TWENTY-SECOND DISCOURSE

“Every Soul Shall Taste Death ... ”

Bismi’llāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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So warn mankind of the day when the torment will reach them; when the wrongdoers will say: ‘Our Lord, give us respite for a short while, so that we may answer Your call and follow the Messengers.’

[But He will say:] ‘Did you not once swear that for you there would be no decline? You lived in the dwellings of those who wronged them selves, though it was plain to you how We dealt with them and We gave you many examples’ [14:44-45].

This you must know, if you travel the road of truth and reality: all that are born shall die; all that is built shall tumble; all that is gathered shall be dispersed. Had we not been born, we should not have to die ...

BIRTH, DEATH, AND LIFE HEREAFTER

Who Needs a Post-Mortem?

Seeing a funeral procession, a curious passer-by approached one of the mourners and asked: “What illness did he suffer from, I wonder? What did he die of?” Turning his tearful gaze toward this inquisitive stranger, the mourner gave the curt reply: “He died from having been born.”

Yes, once born we must surely die. For the believers, however, death is only the passage to life in the Hereafter. Our Master gives this good news in one of his noble Traditions:

“The believers do not die; they are transported from the ephemeral abode to the eternal abode.”

But what is the prerequisite for this? Let us hear from our Master, the venerable founder of the Jerrahi Order, Saint Nureddin Jerrahi, sanctified be his lofty spirit:

Happy are they who, calm and content, give praise to God alone;

Constant in remembrance and in prayer, pure light they shall become.

If anyone so loves the Truth that he speaks the Truth always,

Wisdom shall be his, and ultimate forgiveness he shall own.

Higher than the Throne the hearts of those who say that God is One;

They catch a glimpse of it and circle dizzily around.

Do not frown at the sight of a beggar in humble attire;

Those accustomed to arrogance will finally be despised.

Do not lose the delight of Love’s ocean for this world’s sake;

Do not become a distant stranger, far removed from God.

This poem of Sheikh Nureddin, Qutb, is to Azmi addressed;

Happy are they who pass on, from one abode to the Next.

We opened this discourse with a glorious Verse of the Qur’ān which tells us about that day: the day of death or, in other words, the Day of Resurrection, when the tyrant shall fall into the hands of his victim. The start of that violent and terrible Day is the day on which we leave this world, the day of death. Allāh tells His beloved that we must be made to fear that awesome Day. But on that Day, that day of death, the believers will rejoice in the prospect of Paradise on high and the Beauty of the Chosen Prophet. To them the angels will give the good tidings:

“Believers, have no fear! Do not be sad ... Here is the Paradise that you were promised ... Here is happiness and joy ... For you there is everlasting bliss.”

Those who have said: ‘Our Lord is Allāh,’ and then remained steadfast, to them the angels keep coming down to say: ‘Be not afraid or sad, but glad

tidings of the Paradise you have been promised.' [41:30]

All our worldly endeavors, all the achievements of which we are so proud, where do they end but in the grave? Sooner or later this life is done, and all is suddenly as naught. In this fleeting life, every single thing is temporary, transitory and impermanent.

For instance, health and fitness do not stay with us. We scrape and save up to the age of fifty, with many sacrifices, but then where does our nest-egg go, except on doctors' bills? How true is the saying: "In our youth, we spend our health on making money; in our later years, we spend our money on getting back our health."

Worldly power is likewise doomed to pass away. Many great cities are now in ruins. Where are the owners of those empty palaces and mansions?

With youth it is the same. It comes and goes as quickly as the Spring, leaving a few sweet memories behind. Indeed, a whole lifetime is nothing but a dream or nightmare. We fall into this world of dream or nightmare while sleeping soundly in our mother's arms, suddenly awaking from it when our head strikes the mortuary slab.

When Do We Answer Our First Call To Prayer?

They once asked a certain wise man this question: "Every Call to Prayer is followed by a particular ritual prayer. Is there no prayer to follow the Call recited in our ear when we are born?" Smiling gently, that venerable person

replied: “Of course there is! The prayer that goes with that Call is performed for us at the burial ground.”

Repent, believers, before that day of death comes upon you ... Repent for all the bad things you have done, for all your faults and sins ... Promise never to commit them again; shed tears of remorse and resolve to make a fresh start ... The Exalted One loves those of His servants who turn away from evil, keeping themselves clean and pure in body and spirit ...

ETERNAL LIFE MUST BE WORKED FOR HERE AND NOW

This world is the field of the Hereafter. Eternal life must be worked for here. To prefer this transitory realm over that everlasting bliss, that permanently enduring domain, is to be like those fools who exchange gold for lead ...

The Exalted Lord is no helper of tyrants. He is the Helper of the beneficent and righteous and He is with them. As for those who know neither where they come from nor where they are going, neither why they come nor why they go, who cannot grasp the purpose of their creation and do not try to understand it, who have not come to realize their own impotence and who have no faith in the Might of Allāh, such people will surely be abased and disgraced in the world of eternity. As for the lovers who give their hearts to the Truth, they shall be resurrected together with those they love, to remain with them forever.

ISLAM: SURRENDER TO THE DIVINE WILL

Call on Allāh right now; be surrendered to Him ... Find peace in this world and in the Hereafter ... Peace comes to the truly religious ... The irreligious cannot find peace ...

Religion in the sight of Allāh is submission to His will [Islām]. [3:19]

In this religion you will find the teachings, the rapture and the worship of the hundred scrolls, the four Books and all the Prophets since the venerable Adam. Fortunate indeed are they who enter Islam and are in Islam when death comes to them. They drink death's wine as Muslims, leave this world as such, join the righteous, find salvation from the Fire, enjoy heavenly bliss, gather eternal bounties in Paradise on high, attain the Garden of Beauty, meet the soul of the Chosen Prophet ... The seer sees; the finder finds; he who is, becomes ...

Woe unto him who fails to please his Lord. The Messenger cannot be content with him, while the angels curse him. The believers dislike him, while Satan befriends him ...

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Death is a river whose waters all must surely drink: Every soul shall taste death. Then to Us you shall be returned. [29:57]

THE TASTE OF DEATH

Just as honey tastes bitter to one who is sick, death will be very distasteful to those afflicted with the diseases of unbelief, sinfulness and wrong. For the believer, on the other hand, provided he is perfect in righteousness and filled with Divine Love, the taste of death will prove a delight beyond compare. That is why the martyrs wish to be brought back to life again and again, so as to enjoy their martyrdom over and over. They say that death is the gateway to Union with the Beloved. For unbelievers and tyrants, this union is union with the Fire. For righteous and devout believers, it is union with Paradise, the lover's Beloved, the perfect beauty of Ahmad and the everlasting Beauty of the One. In the world of the tomb, no importance attaches to power, sovereignty, wealth and progeny, rank, status or property. None of these can be taken with us into the grave, where they would be useless to us anyway. The only companions worth having there are a pure heart and good deeds ...

The Man who Wished to be Buried Wearing an Old Sock

Sensing the approach of death, a wise and saintly rich man called his son to his side and gave him these instructions: "My son, I shall be leaving you very shortly. On the day when I surrender to its Owner the trust I have borne all these years, when they have washed my body and come to wrap it in the shroud, I want you to put one of my socks on my foot. This is my final request of you."

Soon after this, the old man did indeed drink the wine of death, leaving behind his goods and property, his children and his dependents. His funeral was attended by kith and kin, friends, acquaintances and neighbors. The body had been washed and was almost completely wrapped in the shroud, when the son remembered his father's wish. Finding one of his old socks,

he handed it to the washer of the dead, saying: “In accordance with my father’s last request, please put this sock on his foot.”

“That is quite impossible,” said the man. “Such a thing is utterly impermissible in Islam. I cannot act against the Sacred Law.” Despite this valid objection, the son insisted: “But sir, this was my father’s final request; it must certainly be carried out ... ”

The washer of the dead was unmoved. “If you won’t take my word for it,” he said, “go and ask the mufti. He will confirm what I tell you, that it is not permissible.” Holding up the funeral, they consulted the mufti, preachers and learned scholars, all of whom declared that such a request could not be complied with in Islam. Just then, an aged friend of the deceased interrupted the debate with these words to the son: “My boy, your late father entrusted me with a letter which I was to hand over to you after his departure. Here, this letter belongs to you.” So saying, he gave him an envelope. Taken by surprise, the boy opened the envelope and read out the contents of his father’s letter:

“My son, all this wealth and property I have bequeathed to you. Now you see: at the last moment, they won’t even let you give me an old sock to wear. When you yourself come one day to be in my condition—though not for many more years, I pray—they will also refuse to let you keep anything but your shroud. Eight yards of shroud are all you will be able to carry over from this fleeting world into the Hereafter, so pull yourself together and be prepared. Spend the fortune I have left you, not for the satisfaction of vain and prodigal desires, but in ways pleasing to Allāh and conducive to happiness and salvation, that you may achieve honor in both worlds. .

What beautiful advice and guidance for those who can under stand! May the mercy of Allāh be upon him.

How does death come to the believer? How does the believer reach Union with the Beloved? How does death come to the unbeliever? How does it send him from this world into the world he denied, into frightful torment? These are the questions we shall now consider:

It is related that our Glorified and Exalted Lord asks every believer after death: “Shall I return you to the lower world?” Because of the agony he felt at the moment of death, the believer gives a negative response to this question of God’s, meaning that he does not wish to go back to the lower world.

As for the unbeliever, he would prefer to go back again, to be able to perform good works and to die in faith. He would sooner bear the pain of three hundred sword cuts than the torment he now suffers and will have to endure.

As for the martyrs, they long to be revived again and again, to die over and over for the sake of their Exalted Lord, and to experience the same divine grace as in the moment of their death.

OUR CONDITION IN THE GRAVE

According to the venerable Usayd ibn °Abd al-Rahmān, as the corpse of a believer is laid on the bier it is heard to cry: “Dispatch me, dispatch me (to

my destination.)” But the corpse of an unbeliever cries: “Where are you sending me? Don’t send me there, I beg you.” It screams imploringly: “Send me back, send me back!”

When a believer reaches his tomb, the earth says to him: “In life, you used to lie down on me. You loved me. I love you too, so lie in comfort now.” But when an unbeliever enters the grave, the earth says to him: “You never loved me. In fact, you detested me. You would laugh as you lay on me, but now you are going to weep. You fed your body with unlawful food; now the worms are going to devour you here.” It presses down upon the unbeliever, crushing him as an egg is crushed beneath a rock and forcing his bones into one another. Under this pressure of the earth, the unbeliever lets out a great yell that can be heard by every creature apart from men and jinn.[1] After the corpse has been laid in the grave and after being subjected to interrogation, he is taken to the intermediate world [barzakh]. Three days later, he returns to his grave, communing with the Lord of All Worlds. He notices that his corpse has swollen up and is bleeding and foaming at the mouth and nose. “Do you recall the days when you lived in the world?” he asks it, then goes away again.

Returning again by divine leave after forty days, he notices that his buried corpse has its stomach open, that its eyebrows and lashes have fallen out, hair and beard are scattered and bloody pus is streaming all around. Seeing his corpse in this condition, he asks: “What has become of you, my corpse? How did you get into such a terrible nasty state? Where are your arrow-like lashes? Where are your bowlike eyebrows? Where are your sweet-scented locks? You used to keep clear of dust and earth. You hated mud. You always shaved and attended carefully to your toilet. You set great store by your strength and power, your wealth and riches, your rank and status. You looked down on everybody else. Remember those days when you lived on earth.” With these words, he sadly enters the intermediate world, never to see his corpse again. Only if people come to visit his tomb will he be sent there by divine leave.

On Monday and Friday nights, he will also be sent by divine leave to his house. There he will bless those who do good works and recite the Qur'ān in his memory. But he will curse his children and all other members of his family if they have forgotten him and failed to honor his memory in these ways. "I bequeathed you so many benefits, yet you neither pray for me nor use the money I have left you to commemorate me through charitable works. Instead, you are living in my house and using up everything I left you. I am rendering account for it here." As he returns to the intermediate world, he will add: "You have made me sad and disappointed. May Allāh the All-Glorious make you sad and disappointed in turn."

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The Tyrant and the Angel of Death (With an internal story about the Boy who never became a Man)

There once lived a tyrannical ruler, whose despotic treatment of his nation and subjects knew no bounds. One day, he wished to go to a certain place. But the keepers of his wardrobe and his household servants could not produce any outfit he felt like wearing. He found something wrong with each of the garments they brought him. Though they came with robes of silk, glittering with embroidery of gold and silver thread, he considered them all unbefitting his filthy person. He threw them all on the ground, trampled them underfoot and spread fear and terror on all sides. He saw himself as a god, an immortal being. It never occurred to his mind that he was destined to nothing ness. He took pride in his vain existence, imagining it to be permanent and everlasting. People who are really nonentities usually suppose they can cloak their ignorance and deficiencies in fine

attire. In truth, they are subhuman, perhaps at an even lower level than savage beasts.

To those pitiful creatures, tailors, barbers, clothes and ornaments lend a semblance of humanity. For true humanity is not achieved by being a king, a minister, a prince or the owner of wealth and property:

Bad character is not ennobled by a uniform. Though its saddle be studded with gold, the ass remains as ass.

To be human is too serious and difficult to be a matter of out ward appearances alone ... In a well-known tale, a villager says to his son: “You are incapable of being a man.” The boy goes to the city, studies, acquires wealth and position and gets to be very rich and important. He even rises to become Prime Minister, yet somehow he has not forgotten his father’s words. He tells himself: “My father said I could never become a man. Well, I have become a scholar, acquired wealth and property, achieved rank and position, even become Prime Minister. Sure enough, my authority over a great country is second only to the Emperor’s. Let me fetch the old man and show him my status, my splendor and power. I’ll really put him to shame by reminding him of how he told me I would never become a man.” He immediately dispatches officers with orders to bring his father in person. They collar the poor old man as he is laboring in his field and haul him off to the capital city. Shaken and bewildered, having no idea what has happened to him or why he has been taken away, the wretched old man is brought before the Prime Minister. The good-for-nothing son does not budge from his lofty seat to greet his stooping father, who has had no news of him for so many years. Lording it over his fawning courtiers in cruel and arrogant pomp and circumstance, he says with a faint smile:

Do you remember, father? You insisted that I could never become a man. Look now at my fortune, my pomp and power. See how I have become a minister, Prime Minister indeed. Well, are you not ashamed of what you once told me?”

The sorrowful old man gives a bitter laugh: “Can it be,” he says, “that you had me snatched from my village and forced to walk for days, starving and perplexed, just to bring me here to remind me of those words?” The arrogant minister looks down at the old man and says: “Yes! Am I not right?” His weary old father heaves a sigh as he replies: “You are right, my son, Yes, you are right. For you have proved my words correct. Look, I shall repeat them now: you may have become Prime Minister, but I am sorry to say you have not succeeded in becoming a man.”

To return to our main story: although this pompous and arrogant ruler had become king, he had failed to become a man. With great difficulty, they had finally succeeded in finding clothes to suit him. In great panoply, he advanced at the head of his army. Surrounded by his ministers and commanders, he appeared tiny to the people who watched his progress, yet in his own eyes he towered above the hills. As he went along with his head in the clouds, he was unaware—like many another fool—that death is on the blade of the sword. In fact, his life was nearing its end: the angel of death and he were coming toward each other. It was noon and he could not realize that everything was bidding him farewell, as he raced at full speed toward death.

Just then, a person in rags and tatters appeared before him. The arrogant ruler bellowed angrily, demanding to know who this man might be and how he could presume to act so boldly. Was this not flagrant disobedience? None of his subjects had ever behaved with such effrontery toward him. “Out of my way!” he shouted in his rage. “I am going to put you in your place.”

The man replied quite calmly: “You cannot do a thing to me. Not even all mankind together could cause me any harm, let alone you.” On hearing these words, the ruler began to stammer in helpless confusion. His anger gave way to gentleness, for his hair stood on end as he looked this person in the face and an involuntary shudder went through his body. In the same calm and dignified manner, the man continued: “I have a couple of things to tell you.”

“Please do not delay me now, said the ruler. “Come to the palace on my return. I will do whatever I can for you then.” But the answer came: “That cannot be. I am under orders to tell you at once the things I have to say to you. No one but you can see me here. I am invisible to your ministers, commanders and troops.”

The cruel and arrogant ruler was now cringing like a dog. “Who can you be?” he asked. “Since I saw you, I have lost my self-possession.” That noble being then replied: “I am the angel of your Exalted Lord who takes away souls and renders bodies lifeless. I break the tall and slender, bend the bow, raze to the ground, give no quarter, make ruins of homes, turn children into orphans and populate the tombs. I silence tongues like those of nightingales. I make rosy faces pale. I deprive kings of their kingdom and pass them to their foes. The bride’s house is taboo, but no house is taboo to me. I have robbed many a mother of her marriageable daughter and brought her to her knees. I have carried off many a mother and left her orphaned babies sobbing. Neither jinn nor elves nor human beings can escape my grasp. It is I who annihilated your father and grandfathers who ruled before you. Now do you recognize who I am? You in your turn I shall kill and reduce to dust. They call me the Angel of Death. I am quite without mercy.”

When the ruler heard these words, his tongue became speechless and his hand lost its grip. He had been struck a blow like three hundred cuts of the sword. He suddenly fell from his horse and collapsed on the ground. Judging that he had died of heart failure, his attendants and commanders conveyed him to his palace for burial. He had made no bequest, so his beloved kingdom was inherited by people he hated. His enemies rejoiced, while his friends were grieved. No one could keep him company in his tomb, where they laid him all alone. Laden with his burden of tyranny and sin, he mingled with the earth and was gone ...

THE MOMENT OF DEATH

When their term comes, they shall neither tarry a moment nor go ahead. [7:34]

Unbelievers and tyrants die very painful, very fearful and very tragic deaths. This is how the Holy Qur'ān describes the torment they undergo at the moment of death (we take refuge with Allāh, Exalted is He!)

By [the angels] who snatch out violently [the souls of unbelievers] ... [79:1]

If you could but see when the evildoers are in the throes of death, and the angels stretch their hands out, saying: 'Give up your souls! Today you shall receive humiliating punishment as your reward for saying of Allāh what is untrue, and for treating His portents with disdain.' [6:93]

The angels referred to here are three hundred and sixty in number. Angrily and harshly, they force the soul of the unbeliever through the pharynx. °Azrā’īl, on him be peace, then takes the soul. It rises toward heaven, but as the soul of an unbeliever it is driven out of the sky and sent down to Hell. Being returned from Hell, it enters the grave along with the corpse. There it is imprisoned and is shown the torment it will undergo, just like a condemned man looking at the gallows while awaiting the hour of execution. It is tormented by having to wait like this until the Day of Resurrection. Then, according to the Holy Qur’ān, it will be cast into Hell and will surely remain in everlasting fire.

We also know from the Holy Qur’ān that Pharaoh and his cohorts are punished in their tombs by exposure to the fire every morning and night. Since unbelievers and tyrants resemble the people of Pharaoh, they too must suffer this kind of torment in their graves and will enter the Fire for eternity on the Day of Resurrection.

May the Exalted One cause us all to die in faith. May He join us with the righteous. Amen, in honor of the Chief of the Messengers.

And could you but see when the angels take away the unbelievers, striking their faces and backs as they say: ‘Taste the torment of burning!’ [8:50]

If they were still lying in their comfortable beds, these unbelievers would leap up and shoot off at top speed to escape from this fierce torment. But escape is impossible ... Some fools may say: “He has died. He has been delivered.” In fact, torment suffered in this world is nothing compared to the torment of the Here after. As the glorious Verse indicates, the violent torment inflicted by the angels is only the beginning of an everlasting torment.

Let us turn now to death as it is for the believers:

Allāh, the Lord of Majesty, commands the Angel of Death to take away a believer's soul. °Azrā'īl may find this believer shopping in the market, for example, and he offers him a salutation. Returning the greeting, the believer will ask: "Is there something you need?" The Angel of Death replies: "Special servant of Allāh, I am the Angel of Death." Exclaiming: "Whatever Allāh wills!" the believer then says: "Welcome. Have you come to take my soul?"

The angel says: "Yes; the All-Glorious Lord has saluted you. I shall take your soul wherever you prefer. The Exalted One allows you a respite."

"Please take what you have come for," says the believer. "Let me leave this abode of affliction for the abode of bliss. Let me behold the beauty of the Messenger, enter my Lord's Paradise and attain its bounties. Do not delay; come, liberate me from this coarseness. The fire of separation has consumed me. I am bent and stooping from lonely wanderings and weary tribulations. For the love of Allāh, send me at once to the home of my Friend. Still, since you have orders to grant me a brief respite, let me start to perform a prayer, then take away my soul. That is my wish: to find union during the ritual prayer, which is the light of the eye of the Lord's Beloved.

The believer immediately withdraws to a corner and, as he stands to perform his prayer, his soul is removed as easily as a hair from butter, returning to the Highest of the High.

One day, the pure Companions said to our Master, on him be blessings and peace: “Messenger of Allāh, we find death unpleasant. Tell us what we should do at the moment of death.” The blessed Messenger replied: “To you, my Companions, and to all faithful believers, such a station will be shown at the moment of death that you will run toward it, eager and happy to reach it.”

°AZRĀ’ĪL, THE VENERABLE ANGEL OF DEATH

When the All-Glorious Lord charged °Azrā’īl with the task of taking away souls, the Angel of Death said: “My Lord, you have set me a very heavy task. Your servants will hate me for it.” But Allāh said to him: “°Azrā’īl, I shall give my servants such pains that they will think those pains, not you, responsible for their deaths. I shall make them forget you.”

This is really the truth of the matter. We keep saying:

“He died of a heart attack ... ”

“He died of cancer ... ”

“He died of a stroke ... ”

In fact, he died of having been born. If he had not been born, he would not have died.

Misguided Compassion of the Angel of Death

The Lord addressed these words to °Azrā’īl, “O °Azrā’īl, have you ever been moved to compassion while taking a human soul?”

The Angel of Death replied: “O Lord. You are the One who knows all things. Everything in heaven and earth is plainly evident to Your Essence of Divinity.”

“Yes, I know,” said the Lord. “I am All-Knowing, All-Wise. However, what I know is for Me and what you know is for your benefit. I have given you the gift of speech, so, let us talk together and let My servants know too.”

“O Lord, a ship once sank in fierce gale. I took away the souls of those on board, but I had no orders to take the soul of one little baby. That child survived, floating on a plank, while its mother drowned. It did pain me to take the soul of that little orphan’s mother.”

Allāh, the Lord of Majesty, then went on to ask: “O °Azrā’īl, were you ever glad to take a particular soul?”

“Yes, Lord. I do recall being happy to take the soul of a certain cruel tyrant, for only in that way could I deliver the people from his cruelty.”

“Do you know who that cruel tyrant was?”

“I do not know, Lord. Only You know that.”

“Well, you said that you were sorry to take the soul of a certain baby’s mother. That little child, who escaped drowning on a plank of wood, became the very ruler whose soul you say you were happy to take!”

If you wish for dignity in this world and the next, if you wish for an easy death, if you wish to be spared its agonies, then behave with rectitude and forsake tyranny and disbelief. Don the crown of justice in place of tyranny, of faith instead of denial. Serve Allāh, Exalted is He. Be affectionate to His beloved, respecting his law and his example. Do not forget that our Master, the Most Noble Messenger, Allāh bless him and give him peace, said: “In the latter days, the reward of a hundred martyrs will be given to one who observes an exemplary practice of mine.”

If the reward of a hundred martyrs is to be given for observing just one of his exemplary practices, can it be that the agony, suffering and pain of death will affect those who respect and observe all his examples? At the moment of death, those who obediently follow these noble examples will discover the Prophetic spirituality. Beholding his beauty, they will feel the pangs of death. Just as the great ladies of Egypt cut their delicate hands without feeling pain, as they gazed on the beauty of Joseph, those who look upon the beauty of God’s beloved as they taste death will surely not feel the pain from the sword of °Azrā’īl.

We should frequently pronounce many benedictions on our Master, the Lord's Beloved, the Intercessor on the Day of Judgment. Loving him is the way to salvation and success. The degrees of Paradise are attained not by mere worship, but by loving affection. The lover is with the object of his love. Said the Prophet, on him be peace: "How utterly mean and stingy is he who hears my name, yet fails to bless me and love me. He also said: "If you do not wish to die thirsty, pronounce many benedictions on me."

Rectitude means adopting the morality of the Holy Qur'ān. A human being must always love Allāh, fear Him and seek to please Him in every word and deed. We must avoid whatever is disliked by our Exalted Lord and condemned by the Holy Qur'ān. Above all, we should never cease to be afraid of dying without faith.

The Last Wishes of the Lovely Daughter of Shaqīq of Balkh

Shaqīq of Balkh had a daughter, the loveliest lady in all the land. She was not only beautiful, but at the same time pious, devout and righteous. Her noble name was Amīna. She said to her father one day:

"Why did you give me the name Amīna? It is the name for one who is safe [amīn] from the three fears, but I am not safe from any of the three. Every soul must taste death. Be it bitter or sweet, death will come to me too. I wonder if I can be safe from the agony of death, as my name implies? Secondly, Satan is our manifest foe. I wonder whether I can escape and be safe from his mischief? Thirdly, I dread my final breath. Shall I pass from this world with faith, or without it? Unless I am sure of passing on with faith, how can I deserve the name Amīna? Besides, even the Prophets used to plead: 'O Lord, let me die a Muslim. Join me with the righteous.' If the

sinless Prophets made such a supplication, how can I be safe from a bad end?”

Her father could give her no answer. In a little while the lady fell sick. Shaqīq of Balkh came to his daughter’s side and asked: “Where has your laughter gone, my child? You have youth and beauty. Good times await you, so why be so downcast?” The lady Amīna replied with a sigh: “My dear Daddy, seeing the things I see, it is time for me to weep, not to laugh. How can I laugh, when the fires of Hell are blazing beneath me? The Gardens of Paradise are above me in their splendor, but shall I be admitted there? The Angel of Death stands at the ready, awaiting the order to take my soul. How can I relax, how can I laugh?”

Her venerable father moved the hard pillow from under her head, meaning to replace it with a softer one, but the lady Amīna protested: “Daddy! Why do I need a soft pillow? Won’t they soon be laying my head on a brick much harder than this pillow?”

Her death was at hand. She called her father close to her and made three last requests: “Dearest Daddy,” she said, “when I am dead, please tie my hands on my breast. Sinners adopt this posture in contrition for their offenses. I have failed to perform my human duties fully and faultlessly, so let my hands be over my breast. Have compassion for my youthfulness and pardon my shortcomings toward you. It may well be that I have not succeeded, due to my childishness and youth, in treating you as a father deserves. Wind me in the shroud, but leave my face uncovered in the grave and pray for me. A father’s prayer for his child is like a Prophet’s prayer for his community. O my dear father, if it is not too difficult an imposition for you, I have four more requests to make: Whenever you see crowds of people, think of the wolves gathering in packs around my grave, preparing to devour my corpse. Whenever you look at a book, let the black lines on the white pages remind

you of the whiteness of my face and the blackness of my eyes. When the dark of night sets in, remember the darkness of my tomb.”

After these words, she said nothing more but: lā ilāha illā-llāh; Muhammadun rasūlu-llah, then passed from this world. The mercy of Allāh be upon her.

The Blessed Prophet’s Advice to Mu°ādh

The venerable Mu°ādh ibn Jabal tells us that he was going some where one day in the company of our Master, the Messenger: “Messenger of Allāh,’ said I, ‘Tell me something that will be useful for me in this world and the next, if I apply it in my life and put it into practice.’ Our Master, on him be peace, replied: ‘If you wish to live like the blessed, to die like the martyrs, to enjoy the shade of the Throne in the heat of the Day of Resurrection and to achieve guidance out of error, then practice the recitation of the Holy Qur’ān. For the Holy Qur’ān is the Speech of the All-Merciful. It will bring you within God’s fortress and protect you from the mischief of Satan. On the Day of the Balance, it will fill up the right scale, the good one. The most meritorious forms of worship for my Community are reading the Qur’ān and acting on what they have read. Every responsible member of my Community must learn to read the Holy Qur’ān, keep on reading it and make it his preoccupation.”

A Serpent Speaks, Staying the Hand of Abū Bakr

A certain man died in the time of our Prophet, and our Master attended the funeral. Just as the funeral prayer was about to be performed, something

was seen to stir inside the dead man's shroud. It was as though it contained a living creature. When they opened the shroud to see what was going on, they found that a dreadful poisonous serpent had wound itself round the dead man's neck and was devouring his flesh and blood. The venerable Abū Bakr was on the point of slaying the serpent when, by Allāh's leave, it began to speak, saying in an audible and intelligible voice:

"I testify that there is no god but Allāh, and that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger." Then it went on to say, addressing the venerable Abū Bakr: "Do not strike me, Abū Bakr! I am guilty of no sin in doing what I am doing. I have been commanded to torment this person in the manner you observe. Allāh, Exalted is He, has ordered me to torment him until the Day of Resurrection."

The noble Abū Bakr then asked the serpent: "By what misconduct has this person merited this torment and chastisement?" The serpent replied: "This is his punishment for three offenses: First, he was too indolent ever to perform the ritual prayer. Second, he was too mean to pay alms-due. Third, he would not heed the learned scholars or act in accordance with the Holy Qur'ān. Those are the reasons why he is suffering the tribulation you have witnessed."

O Lord, deliver us from the torment of the tomb and the fire of Hell. O Generous King, include us not among those who are deprived, who must suffer torment in the tomb. Amen; in honor of the Chief of the Messengers.

A PREVIEW OF REWARD OR PUNISHMENT HEREAFTER

In a Sacred Tradition, the All-Glorious One says: “By My Might and Majesty! I never combine two fears and two securities in the heart of My servant. As for those who fear Me in this world and seek to please Me in all they do, I secure them from all fears on the Day of Resurrection, causing them no fear on that terrible Day. But those who do not fear Me in this world, and feel secure, them I shall cause to fear on the Day of Resurrection.”

Our Master, the Glorious Messenger, says: “The believer does not surrender his soul before seeing his place in Paradise. As for the unbeliever, his soul is not taken away before he sees the depths of Hell and its frightful torments.”

How easily death comes for the believer, when he can hear the words of God Almighty:

O tranquil soul, return unto your Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing. Enter among My servants. Enter My Paradise. [89:27-30]

°Azrā’īl has with him seventy angels of mercy and seventy angels of torment. When the Angel of Death takes the soul of a believer, he hands it over to the care of the angels of mercy, who congratulate that faithful servant as they carry his soul up to heaven and the Highest of the High. When the soul of an unbeliever is taken, however, the Angel of Death entrusts it to the angels of torment. They take that wicked soul to a place separate from Hell, called Sijjīn. As Allāh tells us in the Holy Qur’ān:

Woe to the givers of short measure, who exact in full when others measure out to them, but skip in measuring or weighing out to others! Do they not think that they shall be raised up one awful day, the day when mankind stands before the Lord of all the worlds? No indeed; the record of the dissolute is in Sijjīn. How are you to know what Sijjīn is? ... [83:1-8]

The souls of all unbelievers will be taken to this place called Sijjīn. There they will be sent down to the Lowest of the Low, namely the bottom layer in Hell, after which they will be returned to the grave and left all alone with the torment of the tomb.

Sijjīn is a book in which are recorded the names of those villains—men and jinn—who are to suffer the most violent torment. It is also the name of a most dreadful valley or pit in Hell, where punishment is undergone by guilty jinn and men. There, along with these wrongdoers, believers also pay the price for giving false weight and measure.

A "Beggar" Pays a Rich Man an Unwelcome Visit

There was once a man whose enormous and ill-gotten wealth was like that of Midas. Late in life, he had a great villa built for him, fabulously decorated inside and out. He was so puffed up with conceit that he despised poor people, scholars and lovers of Truth. According to his crude view of things, if they were as clever as he was, they would have acquired goods and property like his. He judged everyone by his own standards.

This man was forever boasting: "All this magnificent splendor is the fruit of my own efforts. It was I who had this villa constructed." He had no thought

for anything except how he would live a carefree life of pleasure and enjoyment, making everybody envious of his fortune. He even went so far as to think himself the richest man alive. He would not condescend to talk to anyone: that would be beneath the dignity of one as wealthy as he! He would not so much as look at the beggars who came to his door, but would tell his watchman, gardeners and bodyguards to chase them away.

One day, this upstart laid on a great banquet for snooty people like himself, atheists with no belief in the Hereafter. The tables groaned under a thousand and one worldly delights, arrayed in the great rooms of the villa. While the empty-headed and pompous guests admired the decor, the chandeliers, the works of art, the carpets and other precious things, the host lounged in a huge, soft, throne-like armchair, proudly showing off his articles of historic value, explaining where and how he had come by them and mentioning the illustrious names of their previous owners. “This cost me fifty thousand, while I got this piece for a hundred thousand ... ” His guests were all agog with curiosity.

While the banquet was in progress, °Azrā’īl came knocking at the door. He was dressed like a beggar, his clothes in rags and tatters, and a bag hung around his neck. He gave a hard rap, then said to the servants who came to ask what he wanted: “I’ve come to see the master of the house. Let him come downstairs and meet me.”

“Are you out of your mind?” cried the lackeys. “Our master would not condescend to speak with a beggar like you, let alone be at your beck and call.” But °Azrā’īl insisted: “Just tell him once.” The servants said: “Impossible. Do you want to get us fired? Away you go now,” they threatened, “otherwise we shall evict you by force.”

The Angel of Death was adamant: “I shall not move without having seen your master.” Again he asked them to summon him. The servants were amazed at this beggar’s persistence, but none of them dared tell their master. Finally, °Azrā’īl said: “I understand. You are too scared of your boss’s anger to call him down here. In a sense you’re right. As servants, you are expected to obey your master and do his bidding. The thing is, I am also a servant, bound to obey my master, the Master of masters, and to carry out his orders. I am °Azrā’īl, whom Allāh has charged with the task of gathering souls. I have come to take the soul of your boss, so go and tell him. He must come and see me.”

Trembling, the servants informed their master of the situation. The owner of the house, never having given death a thought, or rather because he considered death unworthy of him, said to his servants: “Speak to him gently and ask if it is one of my employees, whose soul he has come for.” But before these words were out of his mouth, the venerable Taker of Souls appeared beside him, saying: “No! it is your soul and no one else’s that I have come to take. Do what you may with all the goods, money and things you have collected—and are so proud of having collected. I am coming to take your soul.”

The worldly and conceited Midas did not know what to say or do. He had never stopped to think of death before. His arms and legs started shaking, his tongue began to stammer, his face turned pale with the fear of death and his eyes lost their luster. Downcast and confused, he pleaded: “Could you not grant me a short respite?”

“Impossible. I have been commanded to take your soul and I cannot leave without doing my duty.”

In an instant, the arrogant fellow had suddenly become a miserable wretch. He sent for all his money and jewels. Looking with disgust at the gold, silver, diamonds, brilliants, pearls, emeralds and rubies, which he had anxiously kept hidden in out-of-the-way places, he cried: “May Allāh damn you! You excited my desires and kept me from worshipping my Lord. You stopped me from becoming friends with my Lord.”

At that very moment, something quite unexpected happened. The All-Powerful One, who confers the power of speech on mortal flesh, granted that same power to this sinful rich man’s money and goods, to his villa and his gold. Suddenly they all began to speak:

“Do you imagine you can save yourself by cursing and swearing at us? For a start, you ought to know that you have no right to damn us. Until today, right to this minute, you have placed all your trust in us. We have been your pride and joy. Thanks to us, you could hobnob with kings and ministers, princes and lords, never stopping to think that you must one day enter the presence of your Exalted Lord. Since you had us, you simply supposed you would never die. You looked down on poor men and scholars you encountered, regarding them as less than human. You despised the righteous people who fear Allāh and obey his commandments. Having no fear of Allāh, feeling no shame before His Messenger, thinking of nobody but yourself, you did all manner of bad things. Despite all your wicked ways, we never retaliated. If you had acquired us by lawful means and spent us in Allāh’s cause, we would have been better for you. If you had done that, you would have benefitted from us and would not have cursed us. Had you devoted your worldly acquisitions to the cause of Truth, you would have received at least ten times as much in the Hereafter. But having come by us unlawfully, you made us the instruments of your wickedness. You will certainly have no answer for us in your life Hereafter. You will surely be held responsible and will enter the fire of Hell. We were incapable of preventing your bad conduct and evil deeds. You were in charge, while we were your subjects. The Exalted One had given you the right to use us as

you wished. How dare you curse us now? How dare you try to absolve yourself?”

The rich man, full of pride and conceit, could find no answer to these just accusations. His eyes had been opened, but it was too late now. There was no longer any chance or possibility of putting things to rights. The sword of the venerable Angel of Death fell upon him and he collapsed on the spot. He went to the domain of the Hereafter, where he would be called to account for his conduct in this world. He received no support from the things he had acquired, none of which went with him into the grave.

By divine leave, the angels assume human form. Gabriel appeared to our Master in the shape of Dihlat-al-Kalbī. To the venerable Lot, the angels charged with the destruction of his people appeared in the form of very handsome young men. Lot, on him be peace, took them for human beings and hid them in his house to protect them from the mischief of his people. When they heard that he was harboring young men, they stormed his house. The angels then said to the venerable Lot:

“We are not human beings, but angels of the Lord of All Worlds. We have come to destroy the sinful members of your community.”[2]

THE MARK OF DOOM & SIGNS OF MERCY

When a person is a candidate for death, if his throat rattles, his face turns red and his lips go bright purple this indicates that he is doomed to torment. If his state is tranquil and he utters the profession of faith, being inwardly well-disposed toward his Exalted Lord, a good end is indicated. If pearls of

sweat appear on the forehead of the dying person, gentle tears flow from his eyes, a sort of dryness is apparent in the lips, the face pales and turns to the right, these are all signs of divine mercy descending.

According to Tradition, when Allāh wishes to take the soul of a believer, the Angel of Death approaches to take that person's soul through his mouth. But the divine remembrances that person is making address the Angel of Death, saying: "Angel, you cannot take the soul through here, for this mouth is engaged in remembrance of your Lord." The Angel of Death then appeals to the Lord of All Worlds, asking: "What am I to do, Lord? I cannot take the soul through the mouth." He is then commanded to take it by way of some other organ.

This time, the Angel of Death tries to take the dying man's soul through his hand, but the hand says to him: "Not this way! These hands have stroked the head of an orphan. They have written down knowledge. They have wielded the sword in Allāh's cause."

The Angel of Death cannot act. Again he must make an excuse and ask what to do. He is commanded to take from another direction. He approaches the foot, only to be told: "This believer used his feet to walk to the congregational prayers, to visit the sick, to go to the mosques for learning and remembrance."

The Angel of Death next attempts to take the soul through the ear. But the ear objects, saying: "Not through me! This believer listened to the Qur'ān and divine remembrance with these ears." He tries the eyes, but they say: "This believer used these eyes to study the Qur'ān. He read our sacred Book from beginning to end. He looked wisely on all creatures."

The Angel of Death appeals to Allāh, Exalted is He: “Lord, all of this creature’s organs have defeated me. They will not surrender his soul. How am I to take it away?” At this, the Almighty says: “O °Azrā’īl, write My name on the palm of his hand, then show it to that believing servant of Mine.”

°Azrā’īl carries out his divine command. On seeing that Name, the believer rejoices. With the blessings of the Name of Allāh, Exalted is He, he willingly surrenders his soul ...

What is it to Lose a Donkey ... ?

°Alī al-Nasafi had lost his donkey. Setting out to look for it, he met an unbeliever along the way. Turning back at once, he fell in prostration. In that position, he prayed:

“My God, I may have lost my donkey, but this unbeliever has lost his faith. His misfortune is much greater than my own. I offer thanks and praise to You for not having made my misfortune the same as his. I went in search of a donkey worth a few dollars, while he was going along without bothering to look for what he had lost, though it was no less than his God and his religion, more precious than this world and all it contains. O Lord, do not cause me to lose my religion and my faith, for the loss of these is the greatest misfortune of all.”

“If a Thing Leaves Our Possession. . .”

A man performed his prayers in the mosque. After these prayers he found the wind blowing where he had left a saddle-bag containing pieces of gold. Turning to Imām Ja°far al-Sādiq, the grandson of the venerable °Alī, who was praying in the same mosque, he made this false accusation: “There is no one in the mosque but the two of us. You have stolen my money and saddle-bag.”

The venerable Imām said: “I am a descendant of the Messenger. I do not sink to such things,” But this made no impression. The man insisted: “There is nobody else in the mosque who could have taken it.”

The venerable Imām then asked: “How much money did you have in your bag?” The man replied: “A thousand gold pieces.” Saying: “In that case, come with me,” the Imām took him to his blessed abode, where he gave him out of his own money the sum he claimed to have lost.

Though he now had his money, the false accuser still had the impudence to say: “If you didn’t steal it, why have you given me this money?”

The venerable Imām sent the man away, saying: “I did not want you to go to Hell for falsely accusing a descendant of Muhammad, so I gave you the money freely.”

The venerable Imām had not wanted to call a Muslim a liar, but when the man who claimed to have had his money stolen went and joined his friends, they laughingly handed him his bag, explaining that they had sneaked it

away for a joke, while he was at his prayers. The poor man was terribly upset, realizing what a mistake he had made. He was ashamed of having accused his fellow-worshipper of being a thief. He described the person and enquired who he might be. When he was told that it was none other than the grandson of the venerable °Alī, nephew of the Glorious Messenger, he ran to the house and begged his pardon and forgiveness. He wanted to return the thousand gold pieces he had wrongly accepted, but the venerable Imām would not hear of it. He said: “This is the house of the descendants of Muhammad. It is the home of the treasure of Prophecy, the mystery of Sainthood, the heir to the Prophetic wisdom. If a thing leaves our possession, it never returns to us. Accept these gold coins as a gift from us. Go cheerfully and spend them ... ”

Now, you are asleep; what you see is nothing but a dream. There is a difference, however, for while you are not responsible for what you do in dreams, you accountable for what you do in this world. Soon you will awake. Even if all men died in their sleep, they would awake, says Allāh’s Messenger.

O Lord, awaken us before we die. Give us eyes that see aright and behold things as they really are. Grant us modest faces and sweet tongues. Let us worship You gladly, serving You without sanctimonious pride in our obedience. Transform our wickedness into bliss, our sorrow into joy, our bad character into Qur’ānic character. May we enjoy the intercession of Your Beloved. Protect and deliver us from the power o f our own base nature. Let us not be captive to bur lower selves, nor degraded by our passions. Make us steadfast in worship, constant in pleasing You. Let us derive pleasure from Your remembrance and from Your Holy Qur’ān. Let us die believers and join us with the righteous. Spare us the agony of death, the claws of °Azrā’īl and an unseemly end. Number us among the pious. Let us die pronouncing the affirmation of Divine Unity and reciting the Glorious Qur’ān ... Have mercy on us; forgive us and pardon us ...

Amen, in honor of the Chief of the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds. May our supplication be accepted!

NOTES

[1]The grave also squeezes the believer, but like a mother cuddling her long-lost son.

[2]The story is told in the Holy Qur’ān. The collections of Tradition by al-Bukhārī and Muslim contain many other accounts of angels appearing in human form. For instance, the angels who helped the Muslims at the battle of Badr ...

THE TWENTY-THIRD DISCOURSE

Teachers: True and False

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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And serve your Lord, till to you comes the Certainty, [i.e., death] [15:99]

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THE TRUE MEANING OF CERTAINTY

Sacred Law, Mystic Way, Reality, Wisdom, Cardinality, Proximity, Servanthood: This path of Islam is given all these names, but its destination is always Allāh, His Paradise, His Approval and His Beauty. The seven principles just mentioned are all interconnected, one leading to another. The ultimate is Servanthood, total dedication to the service of Allāh, Exalted Lord of Majesty.

Without the Sacred Law there can be no Mystic Way. Without the Mystic Way, Reality does not exist. Without Reality, Wisdom is unattainable. Cardinality cannot be reached without Wisdom, Proximity without Cardinality, Servanthood without Proximity. Servanthood means being a complete human being. This final stage of human perfection means knowing the Truth, finding through the Truth, thinking and speaking through the Truth and truly being in the Truth. This is to attain the mystery of:

In the seat of truthfulness, in the presence of a King Omnipotent. [54:55]

As for the length of service to Allāh, Exalted is He, this is prescribed in the Glorious Verse: “And serve your Lord, till to you comes the Certainty.”

To keep to the path of Islam, from the age of discretion and puberty until death, is clearly possible if one treads it sure of foot.

In the noble Verse of the Qur’ān, the word Certainty [yaqīn] means death. It is ludicrous to interpret this Verse as meaning: “Cease to worship Allāh, once you have become certain of Him.” To those who understand it this way, let us put the following question: Who could know the Exalted One with greater certainty than our Master, on him be peace? If this mistaken interpretation had been correct, our Master would have been obliged to abandon his worship. But Allāh, Glorious is His Majesty, commanded His blessed Prophet to prostrate himself in worship all night long, glorifying His Lord and offering supplication to Him:

Part of the night prostrate yourself before Him, and glorify Him long into the night. [76:26]

Observe the prayer at the going down of the sun until the dark of night, and the recitation [Qur’ān] at dawn; the recitation at dawn is surely witnessed. Spend also part of the night awake for extra merit; maybe your Lord will raise you to a praiseworthy station. [17:78-79]

Tā-Hā. We have not sent the Qur’ān down to you for you to be distressed. [20:1-2]

The believer should be aware that what are merely recommended practices for us, were obligatory for our Most Holy Master. His blessed feet become swollen from standing in worship. It should not be imagined, however, that our Master felt his acts of worship to be hard and troublesome. In fact, the Messenger of the Almighty considered even his worship inadequate. This is clearly proved by his words: “Glory be to You! We have failed to serve You as You ought to be served, You who Alone deserve to be worshipped.”[1] These intimate prayers of our blessed Master are in every respect worthy of careful attention. They are a source of guidance and instruction for us heedless ones, since they make us realize that he never considered his acts of worship to be as good as God deserved, that he never wearied or had his fill of worshipping his Lord, and that such worship gave him greater pleasure than anything else.

NO ONE IS EXEMPT FROM THE DUTY TO WORSHIP

If worship should be abandoned with the coming of certainty in the ordinary sense, we could not explain the addiction to worship on the part of our venerable Masters, Abū Bakr, °Umar, °Uthmān, °Alī, Hasan and Husayn (on all of whom be the approval of Allāh, Exalted is He,) of the other noble Companions, of the rest of the Ten to whom Paradise was promised while they were still alive, of the Companions of the Bench and the Companions of Badr. Consider the three hundred and thirteen reverend saints, who will never be called to account for their deeds: the Companions of Uhud and those of the Ditch, Uways al-Qaranī, Hasan al-Basrī—the friend of Allāh’s beloved; Habīb al-°Ajamī, °Abd al-Qādir Gaylānī, Ahmad al-Rufā°ī, Ahmad al-Badawī, Ibrāhim al-Dasūqī, Hasan al-Shādhilī, Sa°d al-Dīn al-Jibāwī, Abū-l Madyan, °Abd al-Salām al-Asmar, Muhyī-l Din al-°Arabī, Hajji Bektāsh, Muhammad Bahā’ al-Dīn Naqshī, Shaykh Hajji Sha°bān, Ibrāhim Gülshenī, Jamāl al-Khalwatī, Sünbül Sinān, Hajji Bayram, °Azīz Mahmud Hüdâ’ī and the rest. None of them deviated by so much as a hair’s breadth from the Sacred Law. They served their Lord in all sincerity, in good times and in bad, till the moment they died. They lovingly

practiced their litanies and remembrances. They encouraged the lovers, who came to them for training, to worship their Exalted Lord, and advised all seekers to persevere in their worship as long as they lived. The same example was set by the twelve Imāms and the fourteen Innocents, who were grandchildren of the venerable Muhammad, on him be peace, and the children of Imām °Alī, may Allāh ennoble his countenance.

ECSTATIC UTTERANCES WRONGLY UNDERSTOOD

Confusion is caused by those who distort the meaning of the sacred phrase wahdat al-wujūd (Unicity of Being). Failing to understand its true significance and import, they propagate the pantheistic doctrine of wahdat al-mawjūd (unicity of all that exists), thereby defiling the lofty monotheism of Islam and ascribing divinity to this transitory world, its earth and stones. Some wrongly equate themselves with al-Hallāj, who said: “I am the Truth” [Anā-l-Haqq], when they are actually echoing Pharaoh’s words: “I am your Lord Most High” [anā rabbukumu’l-a°lā]. Mansūr al-Hallāj did say: “I am the Truth,” but he was made to say it. He never gave up his ritual prayer and fasting. If he really was the Truth, meaning God, then who was praying to whom? In fact, he was inebriated, not by any ordinary drink but by the wine of Divine Unity.

DEVILS DISGUISED AS SPIRITUAL TEACHERS

Each religion has places and forms of worship peculiar to itself. Muslims have their mosques, Christians their churches, Jews their synagogues and Buddhists their temples ... They all practice particular acts of worship. Every form of worship ends with supplication. The prayer of supplication is a humble expression of worship. The followers of various religions pray in their respective tongues; acknowledging their own impotence, they beg

their Lord or their idols to fulfill their wishes. Be they Muslims, Christians, Jews or Buddhists, however, none of these worshipped would or could ever say: “I am God.” For every mortal has a beginning and an end. Only Allāh is First, Last, Inner and Outer. He alone is worthy of worship and prayer. This visible world will vanish into nothingness. Only Allāh will endure forever ...

This being the truth of the matter, those devils who assume the guise of Sheikhs, in order to mislead the people, are even lower than the kind of scoundrel condemned by the Holy Qur’ān. Satan himself did not do the things they do; he was afraid of Allāh:

[The hypocrites] are like Satan when he says to man: ‘Disbelieve.’ Then, when he has disbelieved, says: “I am quit of you; I surely fear Allāh, the Lord of all Worlds.” [59:16]

Do not let certain sayings of the venerable Junayd al-Baghdādī and Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī lead you to confound these worthy beings with the scum we have just mentioned. The venerable Junayd did say: “My robe is nothing but Allāh” [laysa jubbatī siwā-llāh], while the venerable Bistāmī exclaimed: “How great is My glory!” [mā a °zama sha’nī]. But while such monistic expressions did issue from these holy masters it was not really they who uttered them. The All-Glorious One caused their mouths to pronounce these words. In effect, He was the speaker. Because they were special servants of God, the tongues with which they spoke were the Truth, the eyes with which they saw were the Truth, the feet with which they walked were the Truth, God was close to them, and they were near to God.

Those blessed with honor and good fortune to meet such individuals would beautify themselves inwardly and outwardly, achieving happiness in this

world and the Hereafter. These worthy beings would solve all kinds of problems for those who came to them, transforming what was evil in them into qualities pleasing to their Exalted Lord and leading them to Him. Such reverend individuals are the heirs to both the exoteric and esoteric knowledge of the Messenger, are endowed with his state and model themselves on his character.

Far from dismissing the Sacred Law as “merely external knowledge,” they explain in language all can understand that the inner and outer are one, and that both are equally sacred. They never deviate from affirming the Divine Unity, never fall into polytheism. They have always taught their disciples that the Sacred Law is the speech of the Messenger, that the Mystic Way is the action of the Messenger, and that Reality is the state of the Messenger. They have made them experience what this means ...

Quite different are those lackeys of Satan, misguided slaves of their lower natures, who appear in the guise of spiritual teachers. Far from dispelling the ignorance of the simple souls whom they trick into becoming their disciples, they actually increase their doubts. In this way, they turn believers from the straight path, eventually robbing them of their faith and causing them to go to Hell. May the Lord protect the entire Community of Muhammad against such usurpers and deliver it from their mischief.

Saint Bistāmī and the Man Whose Undeserved Reputation for Piety Was Almost His Undoing

In a certain country, there once lived a man with a reputation for piety and devotion. Assuming this reputation to be deserved, a person intending to go on Pilgrimage entrusted his mature daughter to the man’s care. Then he

joined the Pilgrim caravan and set off for the Hijāz, the part of Arabia where the holy city of Mecca is situated.

When a few days had gone by, accursed Satan tempted the poor fellow to take advantage of the girl entrusted to his care. After a prolonged tussle with his passions, he finally succumbed and deflowered the unfortunate girl. He felt remorse when the deed was done, but by then it was too late. Wondering what he would say to her father on his return from Pilgrimage, and how he could look anyone in the eye, he took to cursing himself, weeping, moaning and trying to repent and seek forgiveness. But in spite of all this, he could find no way out of his predicament. It was far from easy to make good the evil he had committed. Hopelessly depressed, he confided his awful secret to a learned man. He could no longer mix freely with other people as he used to do, for he was ashamed to be seen in public. The cause of his misfortune was his readiness to pass for a devout and pious man, when his character was still not truly perfect. Although he was still dominated by his lower nature, he had given others the impression that he was master of his passions.

As a way by which he might escape from this calamity, the wise scholar he had consulted advised him to marry the girl he had dishonored, allot her a portion of his wealth and then go into exile for some time. Meanwhile, he should put himself under the instruction of a saint, in order to learn true self-mastery. This saint, the scholar told him, was living in the town of Bistām and went by the name of Saint Abū Yazīd. “Go and present yourself to him,” he said. “Only he is capable of training you, teaching you self-mastery and making you into the man you merely appear to be now.”

The poor man married his ward, gave her half of his money, then divorced her before setting off for the town of Bistām. At every stage of his journey, he said to those who inquired about his origin and destination: “ I am told

that in Bistām there lives a saint called Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī. I am going to visit him." He found that many with whom he spoke were critical of the venerable saint, but this did not deter him from his quest.

When he eventually reached Bistām, he was surprised to hear many of the inhabitants inveighing against the venerable Sheikh he had come to find. "Allāh, Allāh!" he sighed, "I listened to a devil for forty years. Now I regret it and have paid a heavy price. On my way here, I heard not one good word about the person I was recommended to seek out. Now I find that even his fellow townsmen speak ill of him. It all seems very peculiar, but after coming so far I must see him at least once." With these thoughts passing through his mind, he asked around until he discovered where the venerable Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī lived. As it happened, the house was some way from the town and he was quite exhausted by the time he got there. He peered inside from the courtyard, and what did he see? A radiant, white-bearded individual was sitting beside an exceptionally lovely and beautiful girl, who was giving him something to drink from a glass she was holding.

At the sight of this, he became convinced that all the bad things he had been told must be true. He decided there was no point in meeting such a person after all, but just as he was turning away from the door, the venerable Sheikh got up and opened it, calling him by name. As a stranger in a city where nobody knew him, the man was quite amazed to hear someone calling him by name. Filled with curiosity, he approached the door again. The radiant individual, whom he had just seen drinking from a glass held by a young girl, was now inviting him in, saying with a smile: "You wanted to see me. When you took so much trouble to get here, it would hardly be right for you to leave without meeting me!"

Though welcomed as an honored guest, the man sat staring at his venerable host, at a barrel and at a glass, trying to make sense of what he saw.

Noticing this, the venerable Sheikh decided to put his guest's suspicions to rest. "Why do you keep staring at the barrel?" he asked, then he added: "this house belonged to a Zoroastrian. When I bought it from him, there was wine in that barrel you see there. I made the wine into vinegar and gave it away. I now keep water in the barrel."

Recalling the scene he had witnessed earlier, the poor fellow began thinking to himself: "A good explanation, but what about the beautiful woman and the stuff she was giving you to drink not long ago?" The venerable Sheikh seemed to have read his thoughts, for he grew angry, his face flushed and the vein stood out on his forehead, as he said in a stern voice: "The girl you saw is my daughter!" The man was thoroughly abashed and terribly ashamed of his evil thoughts. Falling at the Sheikh's feet, he at once cried: "Pardon me, kind sir, I beg you! From all I met on my journey here, and then from the moment I arrived in your town, I heard nothing but unworthy insinuations against you. I must have been influenced in my mind by the bad things I heard. Pray forgive my curiosity, but why don't you let people know how innocent you really are? Why not spare yourself this blame?"

With calm dignity, the venerable Sheikh replied: "I am not sure of myself. Suppose I give myself a reputation for purity, so that my brothers in Islam entrust their daughters to my care while they go on Pilgrimage. What if I should betray that trust and then have to wander the earth in search of a cure for my pain?"

Such was the noble character of the venerable Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī. As for those who would match themselves with such worthy Friends of Allāh, without correcting their own faults and before bringing themselves to faith, Satan himself is amused at their self-deception.

They say that a hen once fancied the idea of laying an egg as big as that of a goose. She strained so hard to lay her imaginary egg that she finally burst.

People generally do speak ill of Allāh's Saints, yet they never complain about this vulgar abuse.

Being with their Friend, they do not feel what others throw at them. When lovers are locked in loving embrace, does the lover notice a thorn?

The Venerable Moses Complains to His Lord

Communing with his Lord upon Mount Sinai, the venerable Moses prayed: "My Lord, the people are speaking ill of me. Please silence their tongues." The Necessarily Existing Lord replied: "Moses, I have created them and I give them their sustenance. It is therefore against Me they are speaking."

SAFETY LIES IN HUMILITY

Those who said, or were caused to say: "I am the Truth" [Anā-l-Haqq], were hanged because they said: "I". Had they said: "You are the Truth," they would not have suffered this fate.

For saying "I" you'll be crucified, just like Mansūr ...

Better say neither “I” nor “You” say: Hū - Hū ... Nobody has the right to object to that.

He is Allāh, than whom there is no other god. He is the Knower of the unseen and the visible. [59:22]

Satan tries to make us doubt the value of ritual prayer, but it was never neglected by our blessed Master, the Messenger of Allāh, his family, children, wives and companions, nor by the saints and the righteous ...

You should not adopt a haughty attitude to others when you pray. See the prayer as a blessed opportunity, granted by Allāh, Exalted is He, so that you may be received into His presence. You should regard yourself as more sinful that anyone else, offering thanks and praise to the Exalted One. Say: “O Lord, I have failed to serve You truly, I confess my faults and shortcomings.” Offer this repentance after every ritual prayer. Perform your prayers calmly and humbly, not to impress other people, but for the honor of serving the Exalted Lord. Perform them at the proper times and in congregation whenever possible.

Satan Disguises Himself to Tempt the Disciples of Saint °Abd al-Qādir

One day in Ramadān, the venerable °Abd al-Qādir Gaylāni, the Cardinal of Cardinal Saints and Supreme Helper [Qutb al-aqtāb / al-ghawth al-a°zam] was crossing a desert with his dervishes. They had reached a state of exhaustion from the intense heat and the effect of fasting, but they pressed on regardless. A moment came when the venerable Sheikh fell behind in order to attend to a need. At this point, a light appeared before the

dervishes, addressing them with the words: “I am your Lord Most High. Today, I have made lawful to you [the food and drink] which I had forbidden you. Now you may eat and drink.”

Some of the dervishes were reaching for their water flasks and food, intending to break their fast, when the venerable Supreme Helper cried: “Beware, do not break your fast!” He then turned in the direction from which the voice had come. As soon as he said: ‘I take refuge with Allāh from accursed Satan. I take refuge with Allāh from the evil thereof,’ the thing that had appeared like a light immediately changed into darkness.

Now that his bluff had been called, the devil showed himself and asked: “O Sheikh, how did you know that I was a devil?” The venerable Sheikh repeated: “ I take refuge with Allāh from accursed Satan,” but the devil insisted on asking: “O Sheikh, you were pleased with yourself for knowing, weren’t you? The venerable °Abd al-Qādir once again sought refuge with Allāh, and the devil admitted defeat and with drew. Amazed at this, the dervishes said to their Sheikh: “Master, we took the voice for the genuine voice of Truth and almost broke our fast. We were on the point of disobeying our Exalted Lord. How did you recognize that it was only a trick of the devil?”

The venerable saint replied calmly: “My sons, I knew because of the guidance of Allāh, and the inspiration He gave me. My Lord has endowed me with three kinds of knowledge. Those who possess such knowledge and put it into practice are able to recognize the devil through the grace of the All-Merciful. They can recognize and distinguish between the forbidden and the lawful, between the true and the false. The first of these three kinds of knowledge is the science of jurisprudence [fiqh] from which we know that we cannot break our fast unless we are at death’s door. We were certainly exhausted, but we had not reached a point so close to death as to

justify breaking our fast. Therefore, the order was contrary to the Sacred Law and only Satan is capable of issuing such orders. This showed me that the apparition was really not light but darkness.

“Secondly, I knew through the science of theology [kalām]. The Exalted Lord is exempt from spatial location, of which He has no need. This voice came to us from a particular direction. Since it did not come from all sides and every direction, I figured it must be a devil and this conclusion proved correct.

“Thirdly, I knew through the science of Sufism, The noble Sheikhs have all agreed on one fact: Namely, that if the Exalted One were to manifest Himself, humanity would instantly be obliterated and extinguished. But nothing of the sort accompanied the apparition of this darkness in the guise of light. We remained sane and experienced no change in our condition; no symptom of a divine manifestation appeared in any of us. Had it been a manifestation of God, neither knowledge nor knower would have remained. None of us would have retained his sanity or faculties; all our strength and capacity would have vanished in an instant. Those endowed with these three kinds of knowledge are safe from the wiles of Satan. Otherwise, the devil plays with human beings as children play with a ball. He takes their faith from their hands and so causes them to be cast into the fire and to remain in Hell forever.”

As the implacable foe of mankind, Satan will go to inconceivable lengths to lead us away from the path of truth. As we mentioned earlier, he sometimes misleads simple people by assuming the guise of a sheikh or spiritual guide. For lovers of Truth, safety lies in knowledge and practice of the Islamic sciences of jurisprudence, theology and mysticism. It is therefore necessary to follow a noble individual who is truly versed in these sciences and puts them into practice. To follow an ignorant person, with no knowledge of

these three, is to plunge into error with open eyes. To be a spiritual teacher, it is absolutely essential to be versed in these three sciences. Any other pretension can only to be a trick of the devil. An ignoramus does not become a saint directly. If Allāh should choose an ignorant person as His friend, He would first endow him with knowledge. “First a scholar, then a saint”: this is confirmed by Sacred Tradition. According to the venerable Imām al-Ghazālī, a person unfamiliar with these sciences would do better to commit fornication and sodomy than to speak about gnostic wisdom.

In all the hundred and four scriptures, it is clearly stated that the adulterer is sinful and that the sodomite is damned. In speaking of gnostic wisdom, therefore, the ignorant person is worse than sinful and worse than damned. Unless he actually considers such foul behavior lawful, adultery and sodomy do not make a man an unbeliever, but it may be because of his very unbelief that an ignorant person discusses gnostic wisdom and brings about his doom. The followers of such people also die without faith.

When someone knows only the Sacred Law, his knowledge resembles a garden fence. The garden contains fruit, trees and flowers, but many weeds and thorns abound there also. The fence does serve as a barrier, keeping out harmful beasts. If dangerous animals happen to get in, however, that same fence presents an obstacle to their getting out again. Such is the case of those who possess exoteric knowledge. Their knowledge does act as a kind of fence, a fairly effective barrier against evil, although they cannot protect their hearts completely from greed, avarice, misconduct and bad habits. Harmful influences cannot penetrate from without, but they cannot escape once they are inside. Exoteric knowledge acts as a kind of fortress, offering protection and safety from many a danger.

Practice without knowledge is like having a garden completely unenclosed, with neither fence nor wall. Things planted in such a garden may indeed

bear fruit, but there is nothing to stop all kinds of animals wandering in to uproot the plants and devour the fruit and crops. Unless surrounded by a wall of knowledge, pious devotion and inner secrets are lost soon after being won. They give way to hypocrisy, sanctimonious pride or arrogance ...

Real safety is secured by combining both esoteric and exoteric knowledge. Harmful influences are kept outside, while the garden within is tidied up and tend ed. This is the way to protect one's religion and faith from the wiles of Satan; this is the way to achieve one's goal.

All the great Founding Saints of the Sufi orders have been followers of one or other of the four schools of Islamic Law ...

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THE SACRED LAW & THE MYSTIC PATH

The Sacred Law and the Mystic Path are like a pair of wings, one of them external, the other internal. It is impossible to take off with only one wing, and without both wings it is impossible to make a good landing. If you wish to make a good landing, you must cleanse yourself outwardly of material impurities and also purify your inner being of spiritual dirt displeasing to Allāh, such as hypocrisy, sanctimonious pride, arrogance, lying, malice, anger, the love of wealth and attachment to rank and status. To be outwardly dirty, though inwardly clean, is to resemble a water container in the toilet; to be outwardly clean, though inwardly dirty, is to be like a toilet bowl. We must make sure that neither comparison fits us. We must cleanse our outer

selves with the Sacred Law and the love of Muhammad, while adorning our inner being with Divine Love, affection for Allāh's Messenger and his household, love and respect for our Masters the Two Sheikhs, the venerable Abū Bakr the Veracious and °Umar the Criterion, for our Masters °Uthmān of the Two Lights and °Alī the Elect, for the Companions, Helpers and Friends of the blessed Messenger of Allāh, for the Saints of Allāh and for the People of Allāh. We must love all that is loved by Allāh and by His Messenger, disliking all that they dislike. We must keep our tongues unsoiled by cursing. We cannot know another person's heart. If you cannot tolerate those who hurt and wrong the descendants of Muhammad, you may have recourse to the Verse in which the Exalted One says:

Surely Allāh's curse is on the evildoers. [11:18]

CONSTANT STRUGGLE WITH THE LOWER SELF

We must wage constant struggle with the lower self, refuse to comply with its wishes, make it submit to the commandments of Allāh, accustom it to obedience and force it away from the things He has forbidden. We should not answer our critics. We must be patient and steadfast in the face of wrong. Believing that everything is from Allāh, we must look for the fault within ourselves, saying: "I cannot have been worthy, otherwise I should not have suffered this wrong."

We must acknowledge that all our good works and deeds, all our acts of worship and obedience are from Allāh and are possible only with His help and guidance. At the same time, we must believe ourselves responsible for all our bad deeds. We must hold fast to the Qur'ān and to the example of Allāh's Messenger. We must follow in the footsteps of the saints, the righteous, the devout and the lovers. We must shun like the plague those

impious, faithless and ignorant men who assume the guise of spiritual teachers, those deviants and devils who do not know what issues from their own mouths. We must stay close to those who are loved by the All-Merciful, but keep our distance from Satan's loved ones. The following story will help us to recognize those whom Satan loves and those whom he hates.

A Tradition Concerning the Enemies of Satan

This is related by the venerable Anas ibn Mālik:

"One day, in the house of Abū Ayyūb, we were sitting together in the company of our Master, the blessed Messenger of Allāh. Suddenly, we heard a very ugly voice calling from outside: 'O Messenger of Allāh, have I your permission to enter?' Our Master asked us: 'Do you recognize that voice?' When we replied: 'Allāh and His Messenger know best,' our Master said: 'That is the voice of Satan.'

"The venerable °Umar got up and said: 'O Messenger of Allāh, by your leave let me go and smash the deceiver's skull. Let me deliver the people from his mischief.' But our Master told him: 'It is not within your power to do so, °Umar, for he has been given respite till the Resurrection. Nobody can touch him.'

"We all fell silent, waiting to see what might happen. Our Master said: 'There is always an underlying reason for things. Otherwise he would not have come here.' He then gave permission for the devil to enter his presence. In he came, his face very ugly, blind in one eye and with a few

hairs on his chin. He explained that he had come at God’s command, saying; ‘Had I not come, the Exalted Lord would have tormented me as long as I was on earth. You are to question me, and I am to answer your queries.’

“Our Master, on him be blessings and peace, then asked Satan: ‘Who are your enemies?’ To this he replied: ‘My enemies are fifteen groups of people. First of all, my chief foes are you and all the Prophets.’

“ ‘What you say is true,’ said the blessed Messenger: ‘Neither I nor any of the Prophets have any love for you. You are both my greatest enemy and that of all the Prophets.’ Satan then proceeded to enumerate his other foes:

“ ‘My second enemies are scholars who put their learning into practice. They not only study and teach, but also act on what they learn.

“ ‘My third foes are the righteous who recite the Qur’ān and model their character on what they read.

“ ‘My fourth enemies are those who give the Call to Prayer for Allāh’s sake.

“ ‘My fifth enemies are the poor who are satisfied with their lot. “ ‘My sixth foes are the compassionate.

“ ‘My seventh enemies are the generous.

“ ‘My eighth foes are those who perform the early morning prayer on time.

“ ‘My ninth enemies are those who advise the people and call them to Allāh, those who reform the people.

“ ‘My tenth foes are those who abstain from unlawful food and avoid fornication and adultery.

“ ‘My eleventh foes are those who are always in a state of ritual purity, ready for worship.

“ ‘My twelfth enemies are the modest.

“ ‘My thirteenth enemies are those who place all their trust in Allāh.

“ ‘My fourteenth foes are those who give pleasure to the poor and needy.

“ ‘My fifteenth foes are those called pious and devout, who are always busy in the service of their Exalted Lord.’[2]

“Our Master next asked Satan: ‘Have you any friends among my Community? What are the characteristics of your friends?’ To this Satan

replied: ‘O Messenger, ten classes of people are my friends: First, tyrannical rulers and princes who oppress the people. Second, the arrogant. Third, scholars who are the lackeys of tyrants, who cannot tell them the truth, but hide it and confirm their falsehoods. Fourth, dishonest tradesmen who cannot be trusted in business. Fifth, those who take strong drink. Sixth, confidence tricksters and black marketeers. Seventh, backbiters and slanderous gossips. Eighth, usurers, those who take interest. Ninth, liars and blasphemers. Tenth, informers, intriguers who stir up enmity and cause friends to quarrel and fall out with one another.’ ”

Here we have listed all the friends and foes of Satan. Those who worship are his foes, while those who do not worship are his friends. Is it possible to conceive of a spiritual teacher, a saint, who not only fails to worship Allāh personally, but even prevents others from doing so? Anyone who keeps people from their five daily prayers, who makes them break their fast, is indeed an intimate friend—not of God, but of Satan. He is an enemy of the Exalted Lord. We shall see the true condition of such people on the coming Day of Resurrection. They will have a hard time explaining themselves to their deluded and misguided disciples, who will say to them, as they are cast into the Fire:

‘We were only following you; so can you give us some relief from Allāh’s punishment?’ [14:21]

[They will reply:] ‘Had Allāh guided us, we would have guided you.’ [14:21]

‘It makes no difference now, whether we panic or patiently endure.’ [14:21]

‘For us there is no refuge.’ [14:21]

The false teachers will try to blame it all on Satan. But when they start to shower their curses on him, Satan will emerge from the fire upon a throne, addressing them with these words:

[Satan will say:] ‘Allāh made you a promise true; I also made you promises, but I have left you in the lurch. I had no power over you: I only called you and you answered me. Therefore do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I did not believe in the divine partnership you once ascribed to me.’ For the evildoers there is indeed a painful punishment. [14:22]

False guides of this type are found in every religion and creed ...

FRIENDSHIP: FALSE & TRUE

As for those who share a false friendship in the life of this world, leading one another astray from the path of Truth and keeping people from the worship of God, they will all be enemies at the place of Resurrection:

Friends on that day will be foes to one another, except the righteous. [43:67]

But all to no avail ...

The Devil Justifies Himself

The disciples of Abū Yazid al-Bistami, sanctified be his noble soul, once complained to him about the devil, saying: “Satan takes away our faith.” The venerable Sheikh then summoned Satan and rebuked him, but the devil defended himself with these words: “O Sheikh, I cannot compel anyone to do anything. I fear Allāh too much to risk being responsible for that. As it is, human beings throw their faith away for very trivial reasons and I just pick up the faith they throw away.”

Addressing the people of Hell, Satan will say: “It was my duty to deceive you. One of my principal tasks was to make you plunge into the pursuit of pleasure, luring you from truth to heedlessness. I set a yoke on each of your necks. I deprived some of you of your faith, some of you of your honor. I had only to say the word and you would act accordingly. You believed in me, instead of believing in Allāh and in His Messengers. You should be ashamed to blame me now, for you are quite without justification. Don’t blame me, blame your own lower selves. Don’t curse me, curse your own lower selves.”

Those doomed to Hell will find no answer for these serious accusations of Satan. They will all hang their heads in silence. Then the gates of Hell will be closed for all eternity upon the unbelievers and tyrants who must remain there forever.

Believers, you must recognize your foe. Do not become the servants of Satan and his minions ... Only those who possess the following attributes will lead you to God, ensuring your bliss and salvation in both worlds:

Acknowledge as your friend and savior in this world and the Hereafter anyone who calls you to Allāh and to His refined Beloved, who advises and instructs you in worship and obedience, who imbues your heart with the love of Allāh and Muhammad, who teaches and encourages you to respect the noble Companions and to feel affection for the People of the Prophet's Household, who causes you to take delight in your worship, who prevents you from all kinds of sin, mischief and evildoing. When you meet such a noble individual, your heart will surely rejoice. When you behold his blessed countenance, you will remember Allāh and His Messenger. In your heart you will feel the awakening of the fear of Allāh, the love of Allāh and of the Messenger. Embrace him, bind yourself to him and have no fear, for the life buoy you are offered is attached to the life-line of Allāh and His Messenger. Whoever clings to it is sure of salvation. If you can find a noble being combining all these qualities in himself, embrace him tightly and never let him go. You will then enjoy success in both worlds. You will achieve bliss and salvation in this world and in the Hereafter. On leaving this transitory world, you will enter Paradise and behold the Divine Beauty.

O my God, for the sake of Your Most Mighty Name, for the sake of Your Most Holy Divine Essence, for the sake of the mystery of Your Noble Name "The Guide," let us recognize Your friends and never leave them. Keep us far away from Your foes and protect and deliver us from their mischief. Shield us from the assaults and transgressions of Your enemies disguised as friends. Let us truly see the Truth, recognize the false and give it a wide berth. Make us close to the People of Allāh, who walk in the radiant and blessed steps of Your Beloved, following his example and modeling themselves on his attributes and character. May we never be separated from them. Grant that we may die in faith and join us with the righteous. Do not drive us from Your door like Satan. Let us rejoice in Your service, never proud in our worship. May we never tire of serving You. Let us not be employed in evil works in dirty places. Increase our love and multiply our service. Raise us up and do not abase us. Graciously accept our

unworthy service, despite its inadequacy and shortcomings. Transfer our names from the register of sinners to the list of the blessed and fix them there. Deliver us from the Fire, in honor of the blood of Husayn. Let us feel Your pardon rather than Your justice. On the dread day of our death, our last day in this world and our first in the Hereafter, give us no cause to fear, let our hearts be unerring. Send Your angels with glad tidings at that moment, that we may rejoice in Your Paradise, Your Beauty and Your Mercy. Spare us the darkness and torment of the tomb. Save us from the gloom of the Place of Resurrection and the terror of Hell. Admit us to Your Paradise and the vision of Your Countenance.

In honor of the Chief of the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds.

NOTES

[1]subhānaka mā °abadnāka haqqa °ibādatika yā ma°būd

[2]A lover cannot attain his goal unless he embraces the renunciation of Ad’ham, the abstinence of Junayd, the wisdom of Abū Yazīd and the love of Mevlānā.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH DISCOURSE

Fear of the Lord

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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The Qur'ān's Unanswerable Challenge.

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Stories

The Deeper Meanings of Ritual Ablution.

“ ... And what the Breasts conceal.”

Alif. Lām. Mīm. That is the Book, no doubt about it, a guidance for the righteous who believe in the Unseen, perform the prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; who believe in what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down before you, and are certain of the Hereafter. These follow guidance from their Lord, and it is they who will prosper. [2:1-5]

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INTERPRETATION OF THE FIRST VERSES OF SŪRAT AL-BAQARA

The Arabic letters ALIF-LĀM-MĪM certainly carry some meaning and they surely contain certain mysteries. Their true significance remains a secret between Allāh and His refined beloved, whom He sent as a mercy to all mankind. It is also known to certain venerable individuals instructed in the mysteries by our Master, the glorious Messenger, on whom and upon whose family be the blessings of the All-Generous Lord. As this knowledge is not necessary to every member of the Community of Muhammad, however, it has not been made available to all.

Mysterious letters appear at the beginning of many Sūras of the Holy Qur'ān. The following story is told in one of the Commentaries[1] concerning the letters TĀ-SĪN-MĪM at the head of Sūrat al-Shu°arā' [42]:

The venerable Ibn °Abbās and Hudhayfa al-Yamānī once sat conversing together. As is well known, the former was the cousin of our Master the

Noble Messenger, while the latter was our blessed Master's confidant. A person joined their company and asked the venerable Ibn °Abbās to interpret the meaning of the letters:

Tā - Sīn - Mīm [26:1 / 28:1]

"These letters are allegorical. It is not necessary for you to learn their significance," replied the venerable Ibn °Abbās, not wishing to give a detailed explanation and interpretation. The venerable Hudhayfa al-Yamānī then asked the man if he really did want to know the true meaning of the letters. "Yes," said the enquirer, "I am genuinely interested in learning."

"Listen then," said the venerable Hudhayfa al-Yamānī, as he went on to say: "A time will come when a river divides a city in two. That river will flow right through the middle of the city, separating it into two halves. Shortly before the Resurrection, a descendant of Muhammad called °Abd al-Ilāh will be murdered in that city. His murderers will themselves be slain before dawn ... " The city referred to was Baghdad, which had not been built in the time of the venerable Hudhayfa al-Yamānī. The city of Baghdad is indeed divided in two by the River Tigris. The murder, predicted some thirteen hundred years before it occurred, was that of the Crown Prince of °Iraq, °Abd al-Ilāh, one of the pure descendants of our blessed Master. This outrage took place in the year 1957 and it will be recalled that °Abd al-Ilāh's assassin, Qāsim, was in fact killed shortly afterwards, before dawn.[2] It is clear that each of these letters has a meaning, maybe even thousands of meanings beyond our limited understanding. As our Master the noble Messenger explained: "On my Ascension, I exchanged ninety thousand sentences with my Lord. Thirty thousand of these I shall convey to everyone. Thirty thousand I shall convey and explain to deeply learned members of my Community. As for the other thirty thousand, they shall remain between my Lord and me."

The Holy Qur’ān tells us:

He it is Who has revealed to you the Book; in it are Verses plain to understand—these are the Essence of the Book—and others allegorical. As for those who are perverse at heart, they follow what is allegorical, desiring discord and seeking a forced interpretation of it, though no one knows its true interpretation except Allāh. But those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it; the whole is from our Lord.’ Yet only those with insight really heed. [3:7]

This Verse may also be understood as follows: Allāh surely knows the interpretation and significance of the allegorical parts of the Qur’ān, as do those to whom He imparts this knowledge, namely those firmly rooted in learning. To be capable of reflecting and meditating on this, one must possess a perfect intellect.

Those well-rooted in knowledge are individuals like the venerable Hudhayfa al-Yamānī, who have attained certain divine mysteries through the grace and inspiration of the Lord Almighty. To this most holy person and to others of His saints, Allāh has granted such knowledge by virtue of His sublime wisdom. Not every Muslim has access to these secrets, since knowledge of them is not required of all members of the Community.

As for those Verses that are “plain to understand,” they must be known and understood by everybody and are therefore clear to all Muslims. Nevertheless, certain things are better not known, as we have explained elsewhere. Let us leave this subject for the moment and continue our interpretation of the first Verses of the glorious Sūrat al-Baqara:

alif - lām - mīm / dhālika-l'kitābu lā rayba fīh hudan li-l'muttaqīn

In accordance with the Qur'ān, the Prophetic Tradition and the doctrines of Islam, the famous scholars have taken this to mean:

"There is no doubt or dubiety in this noble Book, sent down to you by Allāh, the Subtle and All-Glorious." (In other words: in the Qur'ān, the Mighty Proof, sent down by Allāh, Glorious is His Majesty, by the medium of Gabriel, to the venerable Muhammad.) "This Book is from none other than Allāh. It is the Speech of Allāh. It offers guidance to those who fear their Exalted Lord." In other words, it provides guidance for all who fear Allāh, observe His commandments and shun those things that He forbids. They are shown what they did not see, taught what they did not know and given the taste of what they had not experienced. As Allāh, the Lord of Glory, tells us in His Holy Book:

Be aware of Allāh, for it is Allāh who teaches you. [2:282]

It must not be forgotten that the human beings highest in the sight of Allāh, are those who fear Him:

Surely the noblest of you in Allāh's sight is the most God-fearing of you. [49:13]

Moreover, those who most fear the Exalted One, are closest to Him. That is why our blessed Master is called “Imām of the God-fearing” [Imām al-atqiyā’]. No one suffers harm from those who fear Allāh. Knowing His Glory, Majesty and Power, they are incapable of perpetrating evil, from which they recoil in fear. If they unwittingly or absentmindedly do something bad, they realize that they must return to Allāh, Exalted is He, to enter His presence and give account of their actions. They repent to Him, begging His pardon and forgiveness, because Allāh is Ever-Accepting of repentance. He is Forgiving toward His servants. The God-fearing know their own impotence and seek to serve their Lord. They do not disobey Him. They perform with calm humility the five daily prayers He has ordained. They shun empty, vain and useless talk and avoid unnecessary actions. If they are rich, they pay the regular alms-due. Even if poor, they still give what they can. A penny given in charity by a poor man is worth more in the sight of Allāh than the rich man’s thousands. It is not incumbent on a poor man to perform the Pilgrimage. The poor man’s Pilgrimage is performing the Friday prayer in congregation.

Those who fear their Exalted Lord, preserve their honor and virtue. They keep their eyes from looking into forbidden places, their ears from listening to unlawful speech, their hands from touching forbidden things, their feet from going toward what is unlawful. When we speak of preserving virtue and honor, we should not think only of guarding against offenses motivated by animal lusts. The eye, the ear, the hand, the foot and even the tongue can be adulterous. Everyone knows how wicked adultery is in our religion, and that those guilty of it will go to Hell.

Adultery of the eye is even more serious than this. From a certain point of view it is an even graver sin. But to tell tales and make people quarrel is more wicked than adultery. If a person takes pleasure in telling tales about adultery and other ugly deeds, it is as if he has committed adultery with his tongue. If he enjoys listening to mischievous talk, he commits adultery with his ear. If he looks at unlawful things, he commits adultery with his eye.

The Deeper Meanings of Ritual Ablution

The venerable °Uthmān of the Two Lights once said to a man who came into his presence in the time of his Caliphate: “Go back and wash yourself before you come into my presence.” The visitor protested: “O Commander of the Believers, I do not need to wash; I am clean and in a state of ritual purity,” but the venerable °Uthmān said: “On your way here you looked at something unlawful and so committed adultery of the eye. Go and take a complete ablution and beg forgiveness of Allāh, Exalted is He.” The man immediately recognized his fault, obeyed the order to wash himself completely, then turned to his Exalted Lord in repentance, earnestly seeking His pardon and forgiveness.

A noble saint was once asked: “When does it become necessary to perform a complete ablution?” This was his reply: “For you, complete ablution is required only when you become ritually impure as a result of sexual contact. As for us, complete ablution is incumbent upon us the moment we forget God and become heedless of Him.”

It should be realized that the insight of the saints of Allāh is like a lion, while the hearts of ordinary people are like a forest. Just as the lion roams in the forest, the saints of Allāh wander in the hearts of men. By Allāh’s leave they see the blood in their veins and the secret intentions in their hearts.

ALLĀH IS ALL-SEEING AND AWARE

Allāh, Exalted is He, is the One who sees the black ant on a black rock in the blackness of night, and hears the sound of its tread. He who created that ant and gave it the strength to survive, that Absolute Creator is surely All-Knowing and All-Seeing in relation to us. Our Creator and Owner is He. It is He who brings us to life and causes us to die, who will restore us to life and cause us to die yet again. One day He will receive us into His presence, to question us and call us to account for all our various actions and behavior, for the thoughts we have entertained and for the very look in our eye. So how shall we not fear Him? How shall we not feel ashamed before Him? How shall we not beware of Him? How shall we not love Him? How can we disobey His commandments? How can we offend Him?

The Exalted One may indeed be annoyed and offended by His servant. Even if He would not punish us, how could we bear to face Him after daring to annoy and offend Him?

If Allāh's saints are able, by divine leave, to see and know certain human secrets, is it conceivable that the Lord of All Worlds is not aware of all we do and say? Of course He is aware. He certainly sees and knows all about our condition, conduct and behavior. Whatever we do, therefore, we must never forget our Exalted Lord. We must never be heedless of Him. We must fear Him and be ashamed before Him. We must obey His commandments lovingly, accepting them gratefully as an enormous blessing. Fearing Him, ashamed before Him and taking the utmost care not to offend Him, we must beware of all that He has forbidden.

" ... And What the Breasts Conceal."

In the blessed time of the Most Noble Messenger, an Abyssinian slave came into the presence of our Master. "O Messenger of Allāh," said he, "I have

done a bad deed. I wonder if the Exalted One would accept my repentance for it?” By way of reply, our blessed Master recited the noble Verse:

He it is Who accepts repentance from His servants. [42:25]

The slave went away happy. After a while, however, he came back to the blessed Prophet. His arms and legs were trembling and his face betrayed signs of fear and dread, as he asked: “O Messenger of Allāh, did the Exalted One see me committing that foul and wicked deed?”—“Hush, °Abdullāh, you servant of God,” the final Prophet told him. “What are you saying? Is anything hidden from our Exalted Lord; is anything concealed from God, All-Glorious and Most High? Of course He saw you.” Then he recited this noble Verse:

He knows the furtive glance and what the breasts conceal. [40:19]

As soon as he heard these words, the Abyssinian slave began shedding tears of remorse. “Oh, woe is me,” he sobbed. “Allāh, Exalted is He, does accept repentance, but He also sees the things we do. How shall I enter His presence? How shall I behold His perfect Beauty?” His entire being quaked as he gave a cry of “Allāh!” from the depths of his soul and abandoned his life.

Such are those who truly fear Allāh. Like this pure-hearted slave, they both fear Him and feel ashamed before Him. This is what it means to be a worthy and righteous human being.

The Exalted One commands us to fear Him. This is the essential meaning and significance of righteousness. For a Muslim, righteousness means genuinely fearing God while behaving in a manner that is pleasing to Him. The truly righteous are those who perform their prayers in calm humility; who fear their Exalted Lord and avoid being disobedient to Him; who guard their virtue and honor, shunning words and deeds displeasing to Allāh; who preserve their trusts and keep their promises; who serve and worship their Lord until they die; who humbly abase themselves from fear of the Exalted One, when they enter His Almighty presence to perform the ritual prayer; who do not even notice those to their right and left while performing the prayer. They alone have achieved success, have been delivered from the Fire and have set foot in Paradise while still in this world. Paradise on High is for the benefit of those fortunate people who possess these attributes. They are destined to abide there permanently, for all eternity.

GUIDANCE TO THE RIGHTEOUS: THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

What gives guidance to the righteous is the Qur'ān, the Mighty Proof. The Holy Qur'ān is the Book which Allāh sent down as the perfect scripture, the revelation of which He had promised in the hundred Scrolls as well as in the three great Books, the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel. Allāh, Glorious is His Majesty, says:

And if you are in doubt concerning what We have revealed by stages to Our servant, produce a Sūra like it, and call your witness apart from Allāh, if you are men of truth. [2:23]

THE QUR'ĀN'S UNANSWERABLE CHALLENGE

The challenge of the Holy Qur’ān has gone unanswered for fourteen centuries and it will be so until the Resurrection. Another noble Verse reads:

Say: ‘Even if men and jinn combined to produce the like of this Qur’ān, they could not produce the like of it for all the help they gave each other.’ [17:88]

Yes indeed! None have succeeded—nor ever shall—in producing an imitation of one syllable or letter of it, let alone a complete likeness. For this is the divine decree:

But if you cannot do it—and you can never do it—then beware of the fire whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for the unbelievers. [2:24]

The Holy Qur’ān issues this challenge to the unbelievers, summoning them to the way of God and right guidance: “Since you have foiled to produce the equivalent of one Sūra of the Qur’ān about which you are disputing, and since you remain incapable of doing so, you should now beware of that fire, fueled with men and rocks of sulfur, which has been prepared as a terrible torment for deniers and unbelievers. Abandon your denial. Come to acknowledgment. Abandon your unbelief. Come to faith. Abandon the darkness. Come to the light. Abandon error. Come to right guidance. Abandon the idols you have carved with your own hands. Come to Allāh, who has brought you all from nothingness into being. Fear Allāh, Whose Book is the guide and signpost for the righteous, for those who avoid sin and for those who love Allāh. It will lead them to success, to happiness and to salvation.”

There are two kinds of righteousness. The first is that of the pious, the devout, and the ascetic. They think about the Day or Resurrection, bring to mind the judgment and reckoning that will then take place, remember that they will be questioned in the divine presence and called to account for all their conduct and behavior. They recollect and reflect on the fact that all their sins and faults will be exposed before the Messengers and saints, that all their offenses and failings will be brought to light, and that they will be in a state of shame and dismay among the people gathered for the Resurrection. These considerations are ever present with them, for such people dread the prospect of finding on the Day of Resurrection that they have wasted their lives and become the laughingstocks of all. They are anxious in case their acts of worship and obedience should prove unacceptable in the divine sight, afraid of going to Hell along with criminals and sinners, so that their enemies would say to them: “Now where is the difference between us? You were so perfect, unlike us, yet here we are together. What became of all the trouble you went to, all your efforts at worship while you were in the lower world? It all adds up to zero. We are going to Hell because of what we failed to do. You worked hard, but your work was not accepted, so here we are in the same boat.”

The second kind of righteousness is that of the wise. The sole concern of these worthy beings is not to be in disgrace with Allāh, who is nearer to them than their jugular veins. Their only fear is that He may say to them: “O My servant, I was with you. Whom were you with?” What matters to them is neither the terror of Hell, nor hope of Paradise and its delights. They are afraid of nothing but being deprived of Allāh, of losing His approval and the vision of Divine Beauty. This concern is the sole foundation of their righteousness.

For these righteous people the Holy Qur’ān is the source of guidance. It directs them away from Hell to Paradise, from distance to closeness. It leads them to God’s good pleasure and to the Divine Beauty.

Those who believe in the Unseen, perform the prayer and spend from what We have bestowed upon them ... [2:3]

Those blessed and fortunate people have the following characteristics: They believe in the Unseen. They have not set eyes on Allāh, on His angels, the life of the tomb, the Resurrection, the Bridge, the Balance, the bringing back to life after death, the Judgment and Reckoning in the divine presence, God as the source of destiny and fate; they have seen neither Paradise nor Hell; they have witnessed neither the ultimate union nor the divine Beauty. Yet they believe wholly and completely in the faithful reporter, the venerable Muhammad, on him be peace, in the Book of Allāh revealed to him, and in the information conveyed by the Book of Allāh.

BELIEF IN THE UNSEEN

It is obvious that belief in Allāh depends upon belief in the Unseen. When we say of those who are blind to the Exalted One while they are in this world, that they will be blind in the Hereafter also, we are speaking of those who are blind to the divine attributes, not of inability to see the Essence of Allāh in this world. In other words, those who are blind to the divine attributes now, will be unable to see the Essence of Allāh in the Hereafter ...

If the eye of the heart is blind in this world, the ordinary eye will be blind in the Hereafter. For it is not possible in this world to see the Exalted One with the ordinary eye.

When Moses came to Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said: ‘My Lord, show me that I may look upon You!’ Said He: ‘You shall not see Me.’ [7:143]

This fact is also confirmed and emphasized in the following noble Verse:

That is Allāh, your Lord! There is no god but He, the Creator of all things, so worship Him, for of all things He is Guardian. / The eyes do not attain Him, but He attains the eyes; He is the Subtle One, the All-Aware. / Clear proofs have come to you from your Lord, so if anyone sees, it is to his own benefit, and if anyone is blind, it is to his own detriment. I am not a keeper over you. [6:102-104]

Several eyes have indeed come to you from your Lord. The supreme proof of all this is the Messenger of the Lord of All Worlds, for our Master is like an eye in the head. Those who do not believe in our Master are like blind men. The blind cannot distinguish light from dark, while those without faith cannot separate the true from the false, the good from the bad. The Holy Qur’ān is another eye bestowed on us by the Exalted Lord. The Qur’ān is a light by which we can see, just like an eye. To follow the Qur’ān is to follow our Master, on him be blessings and peace.

The venerable °Ā’isha, the Mother of the Believers, was once asked to describe the blessed Messenger of Allāh. “Read the Qur’ān,” she replied. Where morality and ethics are concerned, the Qur’ān and our blessed Master are identical. Our Master, on him be blessings and peace, was the living embodiment of the Qur’ān.

The scholars and saints also represent eyes that have come to us from our Lord. Their actions and words are the Qur'ān itself, for these beings are so closely bound to Allāh, to His Messenger and to His Book, that they have become words from God and the very eyes of our Community. To attach oneself to them is to follow the Messenger. To follow the Messenger is to follow his Exalted Lord.

To obey these worthy beings, who are a divine blessing and proof, and gratefully to accept these eyes as one's own faculty of sight, is to see the Truth with these eyes, to find God and to possess perfect faith. Those people of faith, who look with these eyes, do so for their own benefit, while those who do not follow these beings, who do not see the Truth, who do not find God and who opt for falsehood, likewise do what they do for themselves.

As we have explained, belief in Allāh, the Lord of Glory, is belief in the Unseen, for it is impossible in this lower world to see the Essence of Allāh with our ordinary eyes. But for the divine gift of those special eyes: the Holy Qur'ān, the glorious Messenger, the Imāms of independent judgment, the noble scholars and great saints, we would have no way of seeing the Truth. These worthy beings are the gateway to the Truth, not its actual substance. They are Allāh's vicegerents on earth. To obey them is to obey Allāh. Love and respect for them are love and respect for Allāh. To reject them is to reject Allāh, Exalted is He. As for those who reject the Truth, no matter how well they may see with their ordinary eyes, they are blind in the eye of the heart. Since this blindness prevents them from seeing the Truth in this world, their ordinary eyes will also be blind in the Hereafter. The Noble Qur'ān states this as a fact.

True believers affirm with their tongues, and confirm with their hearts, their belief in: the Holy Qur'ān and the Scrolls and Books revealed to earlier

Prophets; the fact that the Qur’ān, the Mighty Proof, contains all the truths found in those Scrolls, in the Torah, in the Psalms and in the Gospel; the consequent abrogation of those Scrolls and Books; the permanent validity of the Holy Qur’ān and the Sacred Law of Islam, until the Resurrection; the finality of the Mission of our blessed Master, after whom no new Prophet or Scripture will come; the Hereafter; the Resurrection. Whether deniers believe it or not, no creature, being or substance will be able to escape the jurisdiction of the Holy Qur’ān. All will remain subject to the decrees of this Sacred Book until the Day of Resurrection and Judgment. Those fortunate and happy people who hold this faith and belief will receive their due reward. As for those who do not believe and are without faith, they will suffer the consequences in the form of eternal torment and frustration. It must be as the Exalted One says and wishes.

These follow guidance from their Lord, and it is they who will prosper. [2:5]

“The Believers are those who worship their Lord sincerely, with faith in the Unseen; who use for the benefit of other creatures the sustenance We have given them; who believe in My Messenger, in the Qur’ān revealed to My Messenger, in the earlier Prophets and Messengers and in the Books I sent to them; who believe in restoration to life after death, and in having to render account to Allāh for their worldly life. With the help and guidance of their Lord, Glorious is His Majesty, they are on the straightest path. This righteous band will be delivered from torment and the fire of Hell, to enjoy success and salvation. They will attain the degrees of Paradise, gain My approval and behold My Beauty. These alone are My special servants. These alone are a Community worthy of My Muhammad. Those who follow other paths are completely astray, remote from Me and deserving My Hell, for they have preferred falsehood to truth and error to right guidance.”

In honor of Tāhā and Yāsīn and the people of Yāsīn; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds. May our supplication be accepted!

NOTES

[1]Fath al-Qādir

[2]See also the Commentaries of Tabarī and Ibn al-Kathīr.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH DISCOURSE

“Forbidden Fruit”

Bismi’llāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

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Believers, eat of the good things with which We have provided you, and give thanks to Allāh, if it is really Him you worship. / He has made unlawful to you these things only: carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been consecrated to any but Allāh. But if one is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, no sin does he incur. Allāh is surely All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. [2:172-173]

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By creating each thing together with its opposite, Allāh, Glorious is He, has made it possible for us to distinguish good from bad. Everything has an opposite: winter and summer, night and day, good and bad, unbeliever and believer ...

That is why the Glorified and Exalted Lord commands the believers to consume the best and finest bounties of this world. In the Hereafter also, He has prepared the most exquisite bounties for His believing servants. Without the slightest doubt, there are hundreds of thousands of benefits in every “DO!” commanded by the Exalted One, just as there is equal harm wherever He says “DON’T.” Unfortunately, those capable of appreciating this are in a minority.

ADAM AND EVE

Truly, there are many benefits in those things Allāh has allowed us to eat, while those He has forbidden are correspondingly harmful. This is most

vividly illustrated by the story of our father Adam and our mother Eve:

We said: Adam, dwell—you and your wife—in the Garden, and eat from it plentifully as you desire; but draw not near this tree, lest you become wrongdoers.’ [2:35]

They failed to appreciate the benefit of this divine command. Let us not make the same mistake.

THE FINAL PROPHET AND HIS COMMUNITY

Ever since our glorious Master announced his Prophethood, all men and jinn have constituted the Community of Muhammad, whatever their race and nationality and whatever languages they may speak. Every other Prophet was sent to a particular people, while our blessed Master alone has been sent to all mankind:

We have not sent you but to all mankind, as a bringer of good tidings and as a warner; but most people do not know. [34:28]

Our blessed Master is the final Prophet, after whom no other Messengers will come. From this point of view, his Community is divided into two parts until the world’s end:

The “Accepting Community” consists of those who believe in Allāh, in His angels, in His Books (including the Holy Qur’ān as the final Book,) in His Prophets (including the venerable Muhammad, son of °Abdullāh, as the final Prophet and Messenger of Messengers,) and in the Day of Resurrection. We who belong to this blessed group say:

Lā ilāha illā-llāhu muhammadun rasūlu-llāh

“There is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.”

We affirm this faith with our tongues and confirm it with our hearts.

The “Invited Community” is made up of those who have not yet come to Islam, those who have no religion as well as those who consider themselves members of the religion and community of the venerable Moses or of the venerable Jesus. Ever young and ever fresh, the Holy Qur’ān has been inviting mankind to the Truth for fourteen centuries. It will go on issuing its invitation to the Truth, to right guidance and to Islam until the Day of Resurrection. Those who have not responded to this invitation are known as the “Invited Community.”

THE CHAIN OF PROPHETIC LIGHT

In reality the Prophets form one continuous chain of light, which begins physically with the venerable Adam, but spiritually with the venerable Muhammad. To reject one of them is to reject the others also.

The Cross-Eyed Student and the “Two” Bottles

A teacher once told one of his students to go and fetch a bottle from the cupboard. The student opened the cupboard, where he saw two bottles. He cried: “Sir, there are two bottles here; which one of them shall I take?” The teacher replied: “Oh no; there is only one bottle.” The student insisted that he could see two bottles, so the teacher told him to break one of them. When the student obeyed, he found that in breaking one, he had actually broken both because, in fact, there had only been one bottle. Because the student was cross-eyed he had seen a single bottle as two. To believe in one of the Prophets and not in the rest, is to be like this cross-eyed student. Whatever the venerable Jesus said, the venerable Moses said also. To believe in the one is therefore the same as believing in the other. For this reason, the Muslims do not deny the divine mission of any Prophet, but believe in them all. Our Master, the venerable Muhammad Mustafā, believed in all the Messengers and taught his Community to believe in them likewise. This is confirmed by the following Verse of the Holy Qur’ān:

We make no distinction between any of His Messengers ... [2:285]

LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL SUSTENANCE

The Lord of Majesty says:

[Messengers,] eat of the good things and act righteously ... [23:51]

Our Master, the Glory of the Messengers, said: “Nine-tenths of good works consist in eating lawful food.”

As for unlawful things, they are of two kinds: physical and spiritual. Allāh tells us that the former category embraces carrion meat, pork, blood and the flesh of animals not slaughtered in His name (but dedicated to idols, for instance.) If a Muslim deliberately omits “In the Name of Allāh” when slaughtering a beast, the animal is regarded as impure and inedible according to the Islamic religion. As the Book of Allāh declares:

... and He makes foul things unlawful to them. [7:157]

This refers to things regarded as foul and inedible by the pre-Islamic Arabs. There is no objection to eating the flesh of animals slaughtered by Jews and Christians, provided the slaughtering conforms to Islamic practice, but Muslims are not permitted to eat geese, turkeys or other creatures killed by strangulation. Islam also forbids its followers to eat animals like calves, oxen and buffalo that have been killed by being struck on the head with a mallet ...

Things considered foul and therefore unlawful in Islam include slugs, rats and mice, frogs, frogs’ legs, turtles, worms and snakes. It is reprehensible to eat the meat of the horse, camel and donkey. On a particular occasion in his own lifetime, our Blessed Master permitted the eating of the meat of the wild ass, but this was later made unlawful.

Things which are spiritually unlawful are even more seriously harmful, for they have a direct effect on the soul. Those things which are physically

unlawful are detrimental chiefly to the body, although they certainly have a most injurious effect on the soul as well, since body and soul are closely linked and interrelated. Consequently, if what we take in through our mouths is clean and pure, we shall also be clean and pure in all that we say and do. This is proved by the glorious Verse:

Eat things that are pure and lawful and do good works. [23:51]

Ibrāhīm Ad'ham and the Date He Took by Mistake

The venerable Ibrāhīm Ad'ham once bought some dates. When they had been weighed out, he picked up an odd date, which he mistook for one of his and added it to the rest. Because he ate this extra date, which did not really belong to him, he was unable even to enjoy his prayers for forty days. He lost all his peace and composure through worrying about the cause of this. Eventually he tried to join a religious gathering in Jerusalem but found himself excluded from the company. "For forty days," they told him, "you have been incapable of enjoying your worship because you absent-mindedly took and ate the single date belonging to the date seller. You will not be admitted to our company unless you make amends."

At this the venerable Ibrāhīm Ad'ham went back from Jerusalem to Medina the Illumined, sought out the date seller, paid him for the single date he had wrongly eaten and begged forgiveness. Only after he had done all this was he able to recover his composure and his accustomed pleasure in worship.

PROFITEERING CONDEMNED

How can profiteers enjoy their worship? How can their prayers gain acceptance? “The profiteer is damned,” said the Messenger of the Lord of All Worlds ...

What of those bloodsuckers who live off bribery and corruption, who practice usury and charge interest? How can they enjoy peace of mind and take pleasure in the prayers they perform? Concerning those guilty of such unlawful and wrongful behavior, the All-Glorious One says:

So woe to those who pray, but are heedless of their prayers; to those who make a show, but withhold the smallest charity. [107:4-7]

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BAD EFFECTS OF PORK, CARRION AND OTHER UNLAWFUL FOODS

Those who consume forbidden food are incapable of paying the alms-due. If they do so at all, it is with painful reluctance, for the unlawful things they have eaten prevent them from feeling the spiritual satisfaction they should derive from bringing relief to poor people and orphans.

Be it material or spiritual, unlawful food has a profound effect on those who consume it. We are all influenced by the things we eat. A diet of wheat makes one heavy and sluggish, while a diet of corn makes one agile and

lively. The characteristics of the donkey, camel or pig, appear in those who eat the flesh of these animals. The pig carries the trichina worm, but that is not the only reason why pork has been made unlawful. We Muslims, who do not eat pork, are not the only people who use “Pig!” as a term of abuse for bad characters. Even those who eat pork regularly use it in this way. The pig eats all kinds of filth. It is a selfish beast, the only creature that is not jealous about its mate. One male will cover another.

The prohibition against eating carrion is not intended in the literal sense alone. The Holy Qur’ān states quite plainly that those guilty of backbiting and malicious slander have, as it were, eaten their brother’s corpses. Carrion is physically unlawful to eat, while backbiting is spiritually unlawful. Malicious criticism of someone who is absent, and therefore unable to defend himself, is tantamount to devouring that person’s corpse.

The Holy Qur’ān also states that, in dire necessity, it is no sin to eat something that would normally be forbidden, though one should not consume more than enough to stave off death. This concession applies only to physically unlawful things. In no circumstances does the Islamic religion permit indulgence in things that are spiritually unlawful, such as lying, backbiting, sanctimonious pride, envy, malice or other bad habits hateful to Allāh.

The King Who Badly Wanted a Son

Once upon a time there was a king who loved his queen very much indeed. In fact, they were deeply in love with each other. To the king, his wife was sweeter than a rose. Now, this queen had given birth to five children, all of them girls. The king was very sad about this because he needed a crown prince. He grew more anxious with every day that passed. A male heir was

essential to the perpetuation of his kingdom. Who would inherit his domain if he left only daughters?

Learning that the queen had become pregnant again, the king said to her: “You know how much I love you, but you must also realize that according to our traditions, laws and customs, I must have a son to succeed to my throne. Up to now, all our children have been girls. Of course, we cannot complain about what our Exalted Lord has given us. It is not your fault, but if the child you are carrying turns out to be another girl, I shall be obliged to take another wife in the hope that she can give me a son. I am very sorry, but what else can I do? If I must take such a course, it will not be because I do not love you, but from my desire to secure the succession to my crown, throne and kingdom. I only hope you will understand.”

The king’s words were both saddening and thought-provoking to the queen. She certainly had no wish to share her husband and his love with another. She grew increasingly worried and depressed. It was painful for her to imagine another woman in her beloved husband’s arms. If this new consort should produce a male child, she would gain even more honor and respect. Her son would succeed to the throne and the first wife would lose all power and influence.

She pondered these things for many days and nights and eventually conceived a plan. If the child she was carrying should prove to be a boy, all would be well. Otherwise, she would put her plan into effect.

In due course, the child was born. Unfortunately, it was yet another girl. The worst had happened and she now found herself facing the things she had feared most. There was nothing for it but to embark on the dangerous stratagem she had devised.

She gave the midwife a bag of gold and got her to exchange the king's daughter for a baby boy, born the same day to a gypsy woman. The king was congratulated on the birth of a son. At last he was fortunate and happy. At the royal command, celebrations and festivities were organized throughout the land for forty days and forty nights. When the boy was old enough to start his education, he was given a princely upbringing in the palace by highly qualified teachers. Afterwards, the king had several more sons and daughters.

The prince of gypsy blood was raised in luxury. One day, when he had reached the age of eighteen, a hunting expedition was arranged. The king and his false son went hunting together. The prince pointed to a tree, saying: "Look father, that tree would make good charcoal. It would also provide good material for basket weaving." The king was astonished to hear such words coming from a prince whose upbringing and education had given him no opportunity to have any knowledge of such matters. The king became thoughtful. Back at the palace, he summoned the queen, drew her aside to a quiet corner out of the hearing of others and said: "There is no need for me to repeat how much I love you. Be careful to tell me nothing but the truth. I shall pardon you so long as you keep nothing from me, but if you lie to me, I shall have you tortured till you tell the truth. This child is not mine. Now give me a full and truthful account of this whole affair."

The facts had come into the open. Through her sobs, the queen told the king the whole story from beginning to end. When she had finished, she fell at his feet, begging his pardon and forgiveness.

The king pardoned his wife, satisfied that her misdeed had been motivated by womanly sentiment and pride. The important question was how to trace

his own daughter.

After thinking things over for several days and having consulted his female relatives, he finally reached a decision. He had a golden carriage built and ordered it to be set in a clearing before the city walls. He then brought all the gypsy girls to come and see this golden carriage. As the gypsy girls were admiring the carriage, the king summoned each of them in turn and asked them how much they thought it might be worth. Each gypsy girl in turn set a value on the golden carriage. One said it was worth a sack of gold, one said a sack of barley, while another suggested a pair of donkeys. Each one made an estimate according to her understanding. Then another girl was brought, her feet bare and her clothes in rags. A seriousness and dignity showed in the face of this innocent child whose face was tanned and weathered by the cold of winter and the heat of summer. There was something elegant about her, a sedateness and solemnity, something unusual about the way she moved and spoke. None of these things escaped the king's notice. While the other gypsy girls were giggling together coquettishly, this poor lass with her pure and innocent manner had the air of one unhappy with her lot and bored with her life. Seeing her sad, sorrowful and far-away look, the king felt a pang of pity in his heart. This girl stood there as timid as a dove that had fallen in with crows. They brought her before the king, who asked her how much she thought the golden carriage was worth. The poor girl was incapable of giving an answer right away. She stood and thought for a long time, then finally gave this reply: "Sire, we live on a mountain slope; how should I know the value of a carriage like this? You will get a truer valuation if you ask the tradesmen in the market, who deal in the buying and selling of gold." The king got up and went toward the girl. After giving her one careful look, he was no longer in doubt. Convinced that this girl was his own daughter he gave orders for her "parents" to be found and brought before him. His servants ran off at once and brought into his royal presence a couple claiming to be the poor girl's mother and father. "Is this girl really your daughter?" asked the king. "Tell me the truth."

“No,” said the gypsies, “they brought her to us the day our son was born, gave us some gold and swapped her for our boy.” The woman added, “this girl never took my breast and drank not one drop of my milk. We fed her on animal milk only and raised her to this size. We cared for her as if she had been our own child.”

Realizing that this girl was truly his own daughter, the king hugged her to his breast, suitably rewarded the gypsies who had brought her up, distributed presents among the other gypsy girls and led his daughter to the palace. As for the gypsy boy who had passed for the prince, he sent him away from the palace with a document confirming his appointment as superintendent of forests and virgin lands. Now that the canary had entered the cage, the sparrow that had occupied it was set free to fly off into the wilds. The young gypsy was much happier with the job he had now been given, and so everything came into its proper place and the unfortunate girl came back to her nest after all those years. People show their true character through the things they do, the words they say and the thoughts in their heads.

The blessed Prophet said: “The fortunate man is he who is fortunate in his mother’s womb, while the wretch is he who is wretched in his mother’s womb.” This noble Tradition confirms the principle that character is determined from conception.

The Ruler Who Sought The Mysterious Khidr

A certain ruler once issued this proclamation throughout his entire domain: “Whoever finds the blessed Khidr, and brings him to me, I shall bestow

upon that man the most enormous reward; I shall grant him whatever he may wish ... ”

(Before we proceed with our story, the reader may wish to know something about Khidr, the mysterious divine envoy, so let us digress for a moment: The great Yemeni scholar, °Abd al-Razzāq, was once giving a lecture in the mosque, surrounded by a learned audience of thousands, who sat following his lecture with great interest. The venerable Khidr had joined the company, and he approached a person who appeared to be dozing instead of attending to the lecture. “Why are you dozing?” he asked the man. “Seize this opportunity, for the lecturer is the great °Abd al-Razzāq. Open your eyes and ears!” The man opened his eyes, looked at the venerable Khidr, then dozed off again. Khidr woke him up a second time, but to no more avail, so he delivered a third admonition: “I tell you not to sleep,” he cried, “do not waste this opportunity!”

The man now straightened up and whispered in Khidr’s ear: “You take your lessons from °Abd al-Razzāq [the name means: Servant of the All-Providing One], but we take ours directly from the All-Providing One Himself. Stop pestering me. If I go and tell these people you are Khidr, don’t blame me if they throw you out by the scruff of your neck!” The venerable Khidr was amazed, both at this response and at being recognized. He turned in supplication to the Creator of the Universe, saying: “O Lord, this man’s name is not among those You have made known to me. Who is he?” The Exalted Lord gave him the following reply by inspiration: “O Khidr, I have made known to you only those I love. As for this servant of Mine, he is one of those who love Me. My saints are under My aegis, known only to Me.”)

To resume our tale: The ruler had set his people a very serious and difficult task. Of course, it presented no problem for certain holy men, but would

those saintly beings embark on the endeavor to find Khidr for the sake of worldly benefit and a king’s reward?

A certain learned man did consider attempting the task. Despite his knowledge and wisdom, this person had no worldly fortune and was very poor. For all the fruits of his years of study, he had failed to acquire any worldly wealth. If he could succeed in this, the reward would enable him to spend what remained of his life in comfort. Should he fail, he would at least enjoy the leave given. The matter would then be up to the fairness of the king.

With these thoughts in mind, he approached the king and offered to try and trace Khidr. The king said to him: “This is an extremely important task you are about to undertake. There is no order in my kingdom. My people cannot find any peace or prosperity. I am hoping to use the wise advice I shall receive from Khidr in order to straighten out all this chaos. My kingdom will only last and endure if my people can enjoy happiness and prosperity, tranquility and peace.”

The learned man who had promised he would be able to find Khidr, on him be peace, then said: “Just give me two horses and a little money. I shall ride one horse myself and mount Khidr upon the other.”

The king provided him with the two horses he had asked for, as well as a saddlebag filled with gold. He also gave him three months’ leave. The scholar then left the court and took the animals to his own stable. He used the money he had received to repair and improve his own house. Then he settled down to a life of ease and leisure.

Bowing down in prostration before the All-Merciful, he wept and sighed as he prayed: “O Lord, I know very well that it is useless to seek for Your servant Khidr. I did take this task upon myself, but then I have had nothing to laugh about in this world. Not one of its many bounties fell to my lot. With that I am content, for You endowed me with a treasury of learning. Unfortunately, my children and dependents do not recognize the value of this treasury. As far as they are concerned, worldly happiness lies only in money, clothes, and food. That is why I made so bold as to volunteer for this task. O Lord, do not disappoint this poor servant of Yours. Send Khidr to me so that I may not be the object of abasement and disgrace.”

It is a true saying that fine and peaceful days pass quickly. The three-month leave he had been granted was over almost before he could blink an eye. If we pause to consider how prolonged are the nights for those who lie sick, in trouble and pain, and how short in contrast are the nights when lovers meet, we shall be able to appreciate this better ...

The life of this world seems very short to unbelievers, reprobates and tyrants who live in blissful affluence. Before they know it, that frightful vehicle, the bier, has come to take them for their final ride. For the believers, on the other hand, the life of this world is like a life spent in jail. It therefore seems very long to them. In fact, the length of time that passes is the same for both ...

His three-month leave had flown and the learned scholar abandoned all hope of finding Khidr. He set off for the palace, riding one of the horses and leading the other by its halter. At the palace meanwhile, great preparations were in hand for welcoming Khidr, on him be peace. The watchman came and told the king that the man who had promised to find Khidr was on his way back all alone. The king was too furious to sit still. He ordered his

council to convene and commanded that this man be tried, condemned and executed at once.

The court assembled in compliance with the royal command and the king roared angrily at the accused: “Well, where is Khidr, on him be peace? How dare you deceive me in this fashion? Do you know what it means to deceive an emperor?”

The accused party calmly replied: “Yes my sovereign, I volunteered for a task I would never be able to accomplish, and as you see, I have failed. My hope was to find Khidr, but how could I do it? Alas, I could not find him. Inflict upon me whatever penalty I deserve. I am content to accept my punishment.”

As the poor man was uttering these words in profound resignation, a child appeared and the courtiers took him to be the son of the man on trial. At the same time, the latter supposed the child to be the son of one of the courtiers. This was not as surprising as it may seem, for while the child appeared to the courtiers to be wearing old and tattered clothes, he seemed to the man in the dock to be dressed like a prince. Moreover, it was customary in those days for ordinary people to have access to such imperial courts, where their suits could receive a hearing.

When the accused had had his say, the king turned to his minister and said: “What is a suitable penalty for this man who has deceived me? Speak frankly and let it be an exemplary punishment, calculated to deter others from daring to deceive their sovereign.”

The prime minister replied: “Your Majesty, let this man be put in the mortar used for grinding wheat, and let him be crushed till his flesh and bones are inseparably mixed. Then let us dispatch a sample of this ground-up mixture to each of our provinces. Let us expose them to view in the public squares and have the town criers proclaim to all the king’s subjects that this same fate is in store for all who dare to deceive their sovereign. These measures ought to have the desired effect.”

In response to this idea of the prime minister’s, the child, who had not uttered a sound till then, suddenly cried out: “Everything returns to its source!”

Indeed it is so: Everything returns to its own origin and source. Through his words, each of us reveals his own character and essential nature. This unknown child had now revealed his.

The king now turned to his second minister and asked him what penalty should be imposed. The second minister rose and said: “O Emperor of the World, the punishment prescribed by the prime minister is quite fitting. However, since you have graciously condescended to ask my humble opinion, I shall presume to make a suggestion. According to my unworthy conviction, this man should be subject to the following punishment: He ought to be thrown alive into the furnace and roasted to a turn, then he should be divided into pieces. Each piece should be sent to one of the provinces and exhibited to your subjects in the public square. This should serve the purpose of letting everyone know the consequences of daring to deceive their sovereign.”

In response to this suggestion the child repeated his words: “All things return to their source.” The king then asked his third minister to give his

opinion. “Sire,” said the minister, “this man should be handed over to the executioner to have his skin flayed from his body, which would then be made partly into mincemeat, partly into kebab and partly into cutlets. The various parts should then be sent out to the provinces and put on display as a grim warning to those who might dare to deceive their sovereign. If the measure I propose had been applied in previous cases of this sort, this man would never have dared to do such a thing.”

The proposal of the third minister was greeted with a loud: “All things return to their source,” from the child.

While the three ministers were describing the penalties they would like to see inflicted, the learned scholar sat in his place, sometimes turning pale, sometimes becoming flushed, and bathed in a cold sweat. None of the three ministers had shown him the slightest compassion. None of them had been disposed to pardon him in the least. Of what offense was he really guilty? What had he done to deserve such savage and bloodthirsty punishment? Should not the penalty match the crime? Was not each of these ministers a human being like himself? Surely human beings could not be immune to absentmindedness and making mistakes. Justice could hardly be assured by imposing such severe penalties for such a trivial offense. This kind of punishment could hardly be conducive to popular prosperity and happiness. If they had thought up a punishment to fit the crime, justice would then have been done—and seen to be done. This would have been acceptable to the conscience of the masses.

Harsh penalties of this sort, however, would constitute cruel tyranny. In a country where such tyranny prevailed, there could certainly be no trace of justice, let alone happiness and prosperity.

The learned scholar was partly preoccupied with thoughts like these, but at the same time he looked with pity upon the ministers who wished to subject him to these extreme severities. For these scoundrels did not even realize that, by proposing such sentences, they were really condemning themselves. They were acting like this merely to curry favor with their master.

Finally the king turned to ask the opinion of the chief religious scholar [Sheikh al-Islam], who said: “My Emperor, you have adhered to the principle that safety lies in consultation. Since you have sought my advice, I shall say that the proper punishment in this case is a matter to be referred to your compassion alone. At least this man freely confesses before you his guilt and impotence, in that he undertook an impossible task and failed to accomplish it despite his hope that he might somehow succeed. A person who admits his guilt should not be wronged. It behooves kings to grant pardon. Pardon him therefore, because the day will come when you must appear in God’s court, where you will find yourself in this man’s situation. The sovereign of that day will be Allāh, the Lord of Majesty. In His court you will be the one on trial; you will find yourself in the place of the accused. If you pardon, you will be pardoned, and Allāh will certainly treat you gently. This man should not be punished on the grounds of having taken money from you and having spent it on himself. He has discharged his debt to you by seeking Khidr, on him be peace, during a period of three months, in your name and in accordance with your wish and command. He devoted his time to this purpose. Therefore, he should be required to return to you whatever money is left over after deducting the expenses incurred during his search. If, due to his poverty, he has used up the money left over, it would be proper for you to transfer the sum in question from your privy purse to the public treasury and thereby bring this case to a conclusion. The attributes befitting an emperor are generosity, munificence, and magnanimity. Just as a father’s failings become manifest in the mischief of his children, so do the faults of a king become apparent in the wickedness of his people. The same society that raises a man to ministerial rank can also reduce him to disgrace. The state is like a father, with the people as its children. If a father is good and takes good care of his children and

dependents, they will become his obedient friends. It is equally evident and natural that if the father is bad the children will likewise be bad. Every father has the children he deserves. That is why I maintain that this man's shortcoming is due to your own shortcoming. Pardon him so that you may also be pardoned."

The king was deeply moved by these words so very just and true. Indeed they brought him to tears. At that moment the child, who was still in the court, cried out in a loud voice: "Everyone must return to his origin and source. Everyone reveals his true nature and character through the words he utters and the judgments he makes."

The king had not failed to notice how, throughout the course of the hearing, this child had repeated the same words after each opinion had been given. This time he turned to him and asked: "What do you mean by these words?" The child responded with a boldness and eloquence hardly to be expected from one of such tender years: "O well-intentioned and good-hearted king! By seeking and finding Khidr, you hoped to bring law and order, peace and prosperity to your kingdom. Let me explain the meaning of my words: the penalty proposed by your prime minister made me realize that he is quite unsuited to his office. He is qualified by nature to be nothing more than chief grinder-and-mincer in the palace kitchen. Appoint him to that position so that you may enjoy his tasty pies. In describing what he saw as a fitting punishment, he gave away his true skill and profession and proved that he is really the son of a grinder-and-mincer.

"As for your second minister, he revealed himself qualified to be in charge of the palace ovens. Give him that job so that you can enjoy the delicacies he will bake and roast. By the reply he gave he also revealed his true talent and showed himself to be the son of a baker.

“We now come to the third minister, who suggested a punishment from which we can deduce that he would make a fine master butcher. It would take a natural butcher to conceive the idea of killing and skinning a man, chopping him up and making minced meat, kebab, and cutlets out of him. You should make him chief palace butcher, so that you can eat with relish the meat he will chop and carve. He is a born butcher.

“As you now see, of the three men you employed as ministers to govern your kingdom, one is a grinder-and-mincer, one a baker and the other a butcher. Each of them revealed his true nature through his own ideas and statements. Perhaps they did so unwittingly and involuntarily. Be that as it may, it has been clearly established that none of them can escape the influence of his true profession and craft. There is nothing wrong with those occupations as such, for they are all useful and important to society. The administration of an empire, however, is not a matter of mincing meat, baking bread, or slaughtering, skinning and dissecting man or beast. Government administration requires the service of men suited to it by character, training and maturity. Butchers, bakers and grinders know their respective trades but cannot be expected to succeed in government administration. No more could a statesman do the job they do.”

The human body contains coarse and subtle organs, each organ having its separate function. None can do the work of another. Each subtle organ needs the coarse to perform the function of which it is itself incapable, and vice versa.

Imagine the man who is physically sound and healthy but whose rational faculty is deficient; in other words someone who is mentally retarded. Now picture to yourself another man who possesses all his rational faculties but

is deprived of hands and feet. For all his physical health and vigor, the first man will not be able to start and finish a task. As for the second man, he will not be able to go by himself from one place to another, since his mind cannot do the job of his missing feet. Although he can see, he cannot hold anything with his eyes. Clearly, the eye cannot do the work of the hand, nor can the mind do the work of the feet. Each organ can be useful and effective in performing its natural function. We may even go as far as to say that each possesses its own peculiar nobility.

It is just the same in the sphere of government administration. The machinery of the state will only work if the right people occupy the right positions. The man should fit the job rather than the job the man.

All those present, and above all the king himself, listened to the child in deep and respectful silence as he continued: “My Sovereign, it is not my intention to belittle or blame your ministers by calling them butcher, baker or grinder. My only purpose is to bring to your attention the necessity of appointing each person to a position for which he is qualified and suited. You must be careful to give priority to this, so as to insure the order and stability you desire in the administration of your kingdom. Our blessed Master said: ‘When jobs are not given to the right people, you should get ready for the Resurrection.’

“Having given you my thoughts concerning your ministers, I beg your indulgence while I say a few words about the respected Sheikh al-Islam. We all heard and understood the speech of this reverend individual, whose words revealed his origin too. He is, in fact, the son of a king of India. He left his homeland because a struggle for the throne broke out among his brothers. Settling in your kingdom, he assumed the office of Sheikh al-Islam. It is clear to us all, after hearing the opinion he expressed, that he is a

worthy scion of his royal house. It now behooves you to observe the following:

“You should appoint the Sheikh al-Islam to the prime ministry. To the position thus vacated you should assign the man still standing in the dock before you. His whole life has been devoted to learning and his knowledge makes him truly qualified for this duty. He is a man whose caliber and worth has gone unrecognized until now and only his poverty and need compelled him to commit the offense that brought him here. In fact, the incident has served to lead him into a situation he fully deserves. If you put your ministers in charge of the department I have indicated, each of them will have found his rightful place. You can leave to the discretion of your new prime minister, the present Sheikh al-Islam, the appointment of new second and third ministers.

“My Sovereign, even if Khidr had come he could not have helped you with more useful advice.” With these words he got up and quickly walked away ...

While all were deep in meditation on these truthful sayings, the learned scholar, who had not yet left the dock, leapt to his feet crying: “That is Khidr! ... that is Khidr himself! I brought him, I brought him to you.” Before the words were out of his mouth, Khidr, who had appeared in the guise of a child, suddenly vanished from sight.

Acting on the advice of Khidr, on him be peace, the king instituted some inquiries which revealed that the grandfather of the prime minister had really been a chief grinder-and-mincer, that the second and third ministers were the grandsons of a baker and butcher respectively, that the Sheikh al-

Islam was in fact a king’s son and that the learned man who had promised to fetch Khidr, on him be peace, really was a great scholar.

The king did not content himself with inquiries alone, but carried out precisely and to the letter all the recommendations of Khidr, on him be peace. As a result, his kingdom entered an era of perfect peace and tranquility, of absolute happiness and prosperity. For a long time, administrators and subjects flourished and prospered in an atmosphere of mutual love and respect.

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THE ORIGIN OF TRUE NOBILITY

As sons of Adam and therefore as sons of a Prophet, all men are of noble blood. If this nobility is to endure and be preserved, however, we must obey the Book of Allāh, make ourselves draw closer to Him and model ourselves on His attributes. Our own efforts alone are not enough to make us worthy and deserving of this nobility. It is true that such effort is necessary and even essential, but a father who wishes to transmit this nobility to his offspring must first model himself on the attributes of Allāh. He must carefully observe the commands and prohibitions of Allāh. If he does this, that nobility will appear in his children, too. If, on the contrary, he is guilty of disobedience to his Exalted Lord, of faithlessness and failure to recognize the distinction between lawful and unlawful, his children will follow the same pattern. Just as a good harvest is reaped by one who sows seed in fertile and productive soil, a man who marries a devout and righteous woman will find that she makes him the father of upright, obedient and righteous children. Just as the harvest from seed sown in poor, dry and barren soil is certain to be poor, children born to immoral parents

are likely to have the same bad character. As we have already stated: “All things return to their source.”

A Pious Girl, Whose Grandson Would Be An Illustrious Caliph

°Umar ibn al-Khattāb, may Allāh be pleased with him, was the father-in-law of our blessed Master, and the second Caliph of Islam. One night he was walking along a street in Medina the Illumined, together with his two sons. As they passed in front of a certain house, they overheard a conversation between two women who were apparently mother and daughter. The daughter had been milking the cows and the mother was telling her to mix a little water with the milk, but the girl said: “I could never do such a thing, for I fear Allāh.”

The Caliph and his son listened to this conversation with keen interest. The mother was insisting: “You listen to what I tell you. No harm will come of adding a little water.” The daughter was quite adamant. “No,” she said, “it is impossible; what would become of me if the Caliph should hear about it?”

“How could the Caliph find out that you had put water in the milk at this hour of the night?” said the mother.

“Even if the Caliph did not see, I fear Allāh who sees and knows all things. I shall not water the milk.” On hearing these words, the venerable °Umar turned to his sons and asked: “To which of you shall I marry this righteous girl?” The one named °Āsim asked for her immediately, without having seen her face.

The venerable °Umar did in fact marry that girl to his son °Āsim. That pious lady gave birth to a daughter.

This daughter eventually married °Abd al-°Azīz ibn Marwān, the Umayyad, and their marriage produced a son. They gave this child the blessed name of his great grandfather, the venerable °Umar. He was to become the famous Caliph, °Umar ibn °Abd al-°Azīz, whose name is inscribed in letters of gold on the pages of history. The Umayyad dynasty produced two rightly guided Caliphs. One of them was this noble individual, whose exploits will be recounted until the end of time. The splendid life of °Umar ibn °Abd al-°Azīz is mentioned in all the history books, for he was a perfect man and a Caliph truly worthy of our Master, on him be blessings and peace.

THE TEMPTATION OF ADAM

If Satan fails to prevail upon a man directly, he will use a woman to lead him astray. The first illustration of this is the story of the venerable Adam. After he had been rebuffed by the venerable Adam, Satan cultivated the blessed Eve and encouraged her to persuade her husband to eat the forbidden fruit. Once this had happened, the Glorious and Exalted One banished the pair to the transitory abode of the lower world, to this ocean of travail and toil. The venerable Adam soon recognized his mistake, vomited up the forbidden fruit and began to beg forgiveness, seeking pardon both for himself and the venerable Eve. Let us follow this good example, when we make our own supplications, asking the mercy and forgiveness of our Exalted Lord, not only for ourselves but also for our parents and relatives and all the believers.

This was the prayer offered by the venerable Adam and Eve:

‘Our Lord we have wronged ourselves. Unless You forgive us and have mercy on us, surely we shall be among the lost.’ [7:23]

For three hundred years he continued making this supplication and plea for forgiveness. The words he used were actually uttered so that we might learn from them: “O my Lord, pardon us in honor of the light of Muhammad which I bear”. This supplication was greeted by the divine response: “O Adam, who taught you the value of this light you bear?” The venerable Adam then said: “O my Lord, after you had given me a soul and taught me all the names, whichever way I looked I saw that being’s name beside the Name of Your most Holy Essence. This made me realize that he is the reason for the creation of the world. He is the absolute intercessor. Thus I knew that the light I carry is the light of Muhammad, Your refined beloved. Since he is a mercy to all worlds, he is a mercy to me as well. That is why I begged that we be pardoned in honor of that light.”

The venerable Adam then heard these divine words: “Though a person’s sins be as many as the grains of sand on the face of the earth, as numerous as the waves in the ocean or as abundant as all the atoms in the universe, I shall forgive him even if, far from being a Prophet like you, he is the most humble of My servants, provided he seeks My pardon in honor of My Muhammad and appeals to the intercession of My beloved. I shall exalt the most humble.”

CAIN, THE ARCHETYPAL CRIMINAL

To disobey the Exalted Lord, is to wrong oneself. This is proved and confirmed by the penitence of the venerable Adam. When he had vomited up the forbidden fruit, a poisonous herb sprouted from the vomit. That herb was eaten by a snake and a scorpion. It was from that herb that the snake and the scorpion acquired their venom. A fragment of the forbidden fruit remained in the venerable Adam's body, where it was eventually transformed into sperm and became the seed of Cain, who murdered his own brother. Although his father's offense had been pardoned, the body created from the residue of that offense formed the physical substance of the fratricidal killer who committed the world's first great crime. Even before perpetrating this first criminal act, Cain had disobeyed Allāh, as well as the Prophet who was his father, and the Sacred Law then in force. Although he was the son of Adam, he had forfeited the dignity and nobility proper to a human being. That was not to be the end of the matter, for Cain would become the archetypal criminal and murderer till the Resurrection.

Nations differ, some being superior to others in respect of intelligence, sagacity, cleverness, strength, power and beauty. Differences are also to be observed among individual people, animals, fruits, metals, soils and climates. While men are of noble blood, being the descendants of a Prophet and Messenger, religion, faith and righteousness are absolutely essential to the preservation of this nobility.

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A Donkey Shows Disdain For Straw Bought For It With Money Dubiously Acquired

The venerable Hamidüddin Aksarayi, better known as Somunju Baba, used to preach in the Green Mosque in Bursa, where he gave instruction to those

who understood the inner meaning of the Holy Qur'ān. The venerable Molla Fenari, who was Chief Mufti under Sultan Bayezid and one of the most famous scholars of the age, once happened to drop in on one of the saintly Baba's classes, where he witnessed the pearls and jewels from the ocean of divine wisdom being scattered before the servants of Allāh. He realized that he had failed to understand the meaning of a Sūra of the Qur'ān which he thought he knew, and he listened with delight to Somunju Baba's sevenfold interpretation of the Glorious Fātiha. That day Somunju Baba was at his most splendid and magnificent. With love and ardor he addressed these words from the pulpit to the people of faith who formed his audience: "This Sūra has seventy meanings. It has seven hundred meanings. It has seven thousand meanings. However, one must have wisdom to understand; one must have acumen to hear." The venerable Molla Fenari was surprised to hear these words. He was a scholar himself, yet it had not been possible for him to decipher and understand these mysteries for all his knowledge of Arabic, grammar and syntax, rhetoric and linguistics. His learning was inadequate. Turning to those near him, he asked who the lecturer was. Hearing that the scholar was known as Somunju Baba, he resolved to acquire this knowledge from him and to become conversant with these mysteries. However, he was the Chief Mufti and as such occupied what was, to all appearances, the highest religious office of all. No one must hear that he was studying under Somunju Baba. This must be kept secret from palace and populace alike. He made his way surreptitiously to Somunju Baba's retreat. Inside the tekke he saw some Sufis and dervishes gathered to wait upon their spiritual director. They welcomed the Mufti and invited him to sit down. So he seated himself on a mat and awaited the arrival of the Sheikh.

The venerable Sheikh arrived shortly afterwards and saw the Mufti sitting on the mat with the dervishes. The latter rose to salute their master and the venerable Molla Fenari also got to his feet. When greetings had been exchanged, the venerable Sheikh asked Molla Fenari the reason for his visit. Molla Fenari replied: "I had the great good fortune of hearing your lecture in the noble mosque. I am here in quest of the divine learning you convey. I

humbly beseech you to be so kind as to show me access to these divine mysteries."

To this the venerable Sheikh responded by saying: "The tasks we set are quite heavy and rather difficult to perform. If you are sure you can carry them out, then by all means." He added at once: "Master Mufti, you must now mount my donkey, circuit Bursa wearing your official attire and then come back to me here."

The venerable Molla Fenari wondered how he could obey this command. To ride around the streets of Bursa on a donkey, dressed in the official robes of the Chief Mufti, would be to expose himself to public ridicule. The story would certainly reach the palace and come to the ear of the Sultan himself. Realizing that he was incapable of doing this, he implored the venerable Sheikh: "One can but speak the truth in your presence. I asked myself and it would not accept this task. Could you not give me an easier duty?" The venerable Sheikh replied: "At least you have demonstrated your humility by condescending to come here and sit on the same mat as my dervishes. Now go away and write a commentary on Sūrat al-Fātiha." The venerable Molla Fenari accepted this assignment and offered a bag of gold in token of his gratitude for the Sheikh's gracious favor. "Please spend this money on your dervishes," said he, but the venerable Sheikh declined the offer without hesitation. Molla Fenari then said: " I beg to assure you that these coins do not come from the public treasury. They represent the proceeds from the estate I inherited from my father."

The venerable Sheikh now took the purse, extracted a few coins and handed them to one of the dervishes. "Take this money," he told him, "and buy a little barley and straw so that we may give our good donkey a banquet." The dervish ran off to carry out this order, returning when he had bought the barley and straw which he set before the donkey.

As we have already explained, there are distinctions even among animals. The venerable Sheikh's donkey was certainly different from others of its kind. It took one sniff at the barley and straw that had been set before it, turned its back as if treating such food with disdain, pissed on it and trampled it under foot.

"Master Mufti," said the venerable Sheikh, "as you see, even your donkey refuses to eat what you said was a lawful offering. How then could we dervishes use this money?"

Covered in confusion, Molla Fenari returned to his home. There, by the grace and permission of the saints, he wrote a commentary on the Fātiha.[1]

One wonders what divine knowledge Molla Fenari would have acquired if only he had made a tour of the city on the back of a donkey ...

Where a saint is concerned, we have seen how the very donkey he rode would refuse to eat fodder bought with money doubtfully acquired. As for ourselves, we are slaves of the Exalted Lord, followers of the chief of the Prophets, and servants of the saints of Allāh. It therefore behooves us to eat lawful food, to prefer lawful things and to shun all that is unlawful. To consume things that are pure and good is part of the business of being a believer. We must not forget that the consumption of unlawful food defiles the heart, is the cause of suffering and brings many misfortunes down upon a man and his family. If a father eats unlawful food, his children will suffer the bad effects. If a soldier does so, he will be a coward, unable to stand his ground in the face of the foe. If a scholar does so, he will fail to profit from

his knowledge. If a worshipper does so, he will find no joy in his worship and obedience.

PROTECTION AFFORDED BY THE PRESENCE OF SAINTS

If a saint forsakes a town, is expelled from it or is murdered there, that town will surely suffer some affliction, for the saints of Allāh are like lightning rods. They provide a shield for those who take refuge with them. Allāh, Glorified and Exalted is He, said to His refined Beloved:

But Allāh would not punish them while you were among them ... [8:33]

Since the saints of Allāh are the heirs of our Blessed Master, divine punishment will not descend on a place so long as they are in it ... Shortly after Somunju Baba left Bursa, that city fell to Tamerlane and its inhabitants experienced a terrible disaster. The Sultan of Scholars forsook the city of Balkh having been abused by its ruler. He had barely reached Baghdād before the Mongols seized Balkh, subjecting its people to a crushing celestial catastrophe.

The saints should be recognized as one of God’s greatest bounties. To them as to the learned, great respect must be shown. Any nation that despises saints and scholars will certainly be wiped off the map.

A Saint Teaches A Tyrant The Error Of His Ways

A saint once saw the ruler approaching his convent to visit him, whereupon he immediately got into bed, drew the blanket over his face and instructed his son to receive the king.

The ruler arrived and asked the boy where his father was. Receiving the reply: “He is in bed, Sire,” the king was about to ask whether he was sick when the saint cried from within: “No, there is nothing wrong with my health. I went to bed and covered my head so as not to see your face, for you are a tyrannical ruler. I am trying to escape from you and the Hellfire that will envelop those who go near you. To see your face is like seeing the fire of Hell.”

After a moment’s pause the king asked: “What has reduced me to this condition?” “Your abuse of the people’s rights and your tyrannical expropriation of their wealth,” said the saint.

Far from being angered by these words, the king acknowledged the error of his ways, restored to the people what he had wrongfully taken from them, brought justice to his kingdom and led his people to peace and prosperity.

Saints and scholars are just like mirrors. Those who look at them see their own faults. Do not smash the mirror because it makes your face look dirty. If you wash your face it will look clean in the mirror.

Throughout history many saints and scholars have been put to death, accused of eating unlawful food. In fact, their accusers and killers were people who ate forbidden food, on which they had been nursed, weaned and

raised; in other words, they smashed the mirrors that reflected their own character ...

Those who eat lawful food become just, honest, mature, beneficent, and their character is apparent. No matter how much mud is thrown at them, perceptive people recognize their fine qualities immediately.

O Lord, let us see the beautiful and the ugly for what they are ... O Lord, do not disguise from us our wicked acts and ugly deeds. Make us wary of the unlawful and accustomed to the lawful. Grant that we may find lawful sustenance. Keep us from touching what is obtained by lying and unlawful means. Make us enjoy what we earn by the sweat of our brow. Make us shun whatever is unlawful, whether materially or spiritually ...

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Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds ...

NOTES

[1]This work, entitled °Aynu-l'a°yān, is recommended reading for those who know Arabic.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH DISCOURSE

“When the Trumpet Shall Sound”

Bismi’llāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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O people, fear your Lord! The earthquake of the Hour is an awesome thing indeed. / On the day when you behold it, every nursing mother will forget her nursling and every pregnant female will miscarry, and you will see mankind as drunk, though they are not drunk; but Allāh's punishment is terrible. [22:1-2].

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CERTAINTY OF THE RESURRECTION, ALTHOUGH ITS TIME IS MERCIFULLY CONCEALED FROM US

How could any human being not fear the vehemence and terror of that Day? How could he fail to lose his wits from sheer bewilderment? How could he not become a reeling drunkard? The heavens will be rent asunder, the stars will be strewn and scattered, the seas will boil till their waters turn to fire, the sun will be rolled up in a ball, the mountains will be wrenched from their moorings and their atoms will fly across the sky like clouds, everyone will forget his goods and property and think only of himself, the savage beasts will forget their mutual enmities and huddle all together.

Is that all? No! All persons will gather in pairs, everyone will seek his companion and soul mate, tyrant will join with tyrant, scoundrel with scoundrel, thief with thief, atheist with atheist. Those who love the Prophets will join with the Prophets, those who love the good, with the good, and those who love the bad, with the bad.

What more will there be? The heavens will melt and shower down upon the people in the form of fiery, molten brass, the sky will shatter into fragments red like hot ashes, people will seek to flee the divine punishment by taking refuge in some nook or cranny—but in vain!

Can you imagine the vehemence and terror of that Day? Could any witness of it keep his sanity? Could a child stay in the womb? Surely, men will lose their minds, pregnant women will abort their babies, mothers will throw down their suckling infants and become incapable even of thinking of themselves.

This momentous event called the Resurrection will surely and certainly come to pass. Just as all that are born must die and all that is built must crumble, this universe must one day end and be annihilated. It will then be transformed into another universe by God's command. Each individual will undergo interrogation concerning every moment lived in this lower world. All will give account of their every action, deed and word, Their good deeds will be weighed against the bad. When all this is completed, those who receive their records from the right will enter Paradise, while those who receive them from the left or from behind will be dispatched to Hell to suffer the penalty for what they have done.

As for those who have faith yet must enter Hell because of their sins, after meeting the punishment they deserve, they will be delivered from fire and torment by the Intercession of Muhammad and received into Paradise. As for the unbelievers, they will remain forever at the depth of Hell corresponding to their degree of unbelief and will merit everlasting torment.

No one can tell exactly when he is going to die, even though symptoms of approaching death may appear in a dying man. Similarly, although we have

been made aware of the signs that will herald the Resurrection, only Allāh knows precisely when it will begin. There may be few extraordinary individuals to whom He has confided this knowledge, but they have not been commanded to share it with others.

Chief of those beings of noble worth who know when the Resurrection will break, but are not authorized to tell, is the Lord's Beloved and the Intercessor of Judgment Day, namely our venerable Master Abu-l Qāsim Muhammad Mustafā. That most holy being is acquainted with all knowledge from first to last, inside and out ... Certain fragments of Allāh's secret knowledge were also entrusted to our Masters Hudhayfa al-Yamānī, Imām °Alī and Ibn °Abbās.

Our blessed Master said: "On my Ascension I learned ninety thousand propositions from my Lord.

"Thirty thousand of these I have communicated to my entire community; thirty thousand I have taught and entrusted to my family alone, while the remaining thirty thousand are a secret between me and my Lord."

In this connection, it is a great mistake to suppose that our blessed Master, the most Noble Messenger, did not know the time of the Resurrection. He knew, but was not given the responsibility for communicating it. When an Arab tribesman once asked him when the Resurrection was due, the Messenger of Allāh replied: "The Resurrection must certainly come, but what will you gain by knowing when? What have you prepared against the Day of Resurrection? That is the important question for you."

“I have nothing ready,” said the tribesman. “My acts of worship do not amount to much—I just do my five daily prayers and keep the fast in Ramadān. I neither pray at great length nor fast outside of Ramadān. However, I love you and Allāh the All-Glorious more than my life.”

“O tribesman, I have good news for you: a person is with the one he loves and so you are with me.”

Like the tribesman in this story, let us love Allāh and His Messenger so that we may be with him at the Place of Resurrection and in Paradise.

It is to insure that we keep our lives going that the day of our death is kept hidden from us. Just as this applies to us as individuals, the human race as a whole is denied knowledge of the time of the Resurrection so that worldly activity will continue. If an individual knew the day and hour of his death he would not be able to set one stone on top of another. As things are, he has no idea when he will die and so he works in this world as though he were immortal. It seldom dawns on him that he is working and preparing possibilities for others and suddenly he is no more.

There are many things it is better not to know than to know. From this point of view, absentmindedness is a great boon to mankind.

Heedlessness becomes a great misfortune, if it reaches such proportions as to make us forget Allāh and the Hereafter, and the fact that we must die sooner or later.

The Man Who Wished to Understand the Language of Animals

One of the children of Israel once approached the venerable Moses and asked to be taught the language of animals. The venerable Moses advised him to concentrate rather on human speech, but the man insisted, pleading: “Speak to Allāh, since you are His Converser, and ask Him to teach me the language of animals.”

“It is better that you do not understand that language,” said the venerable Moses, as he went up Mount Sinai. But the All-Glorious Lord addressed him, saying: “Moses, I have accepted the plea of that servant of Mine who wishes to learn the language of animals. Henceforth he will understand all their tongues. However, he should be very circumspect.”

The venerable Moses came back down from Mount Sinai, found the man, told him that his wish had been granted and reminded him that he must observe moderation.

The following morning, as the fellow was on his way to the barn to start the day’s work, he heard a conversation going on between his ox and his donkey. The ox was telling his troubles to his stable-mates. “Oh, oh, my brother donkey,” said he. “Don’t ask how I am! In winter they drive me to the village, in summer to the fields and in autumn they yoke me to the cart. They make me work year in year out, though I’m only half fed. I’ll soon be too old to be useful anymore so they’ll give me to the butcher to be slaughtered. Then they’ll use my hide to make shoes, my horns to make handles for knives, and my flesh will become roast beef. Oh, those human beings! I cannot tell you what I have suffered at their hands ... !

The donkey replied: “You must be crazy—your own stupidity brings all those troubles on your head. Why go everywhere you are driven? Pretend to be sick now and then, and our master will give you a break. Why don’t you give it a try? Next time he comes to put you in harness, you must refuse to budge; but keep calm even if he beats you and kicks you. He will assume you are sick and leave you in peace, so that you can lie here and chew the cud all day long.”

Overhearing this cozy chat, the peasant said to himself: “I’ll show the pair of them!” He then went into the stable and approached the ox in the usual way. He tried to make it get up, but the beast followed its friend’s advice and pretended to take no notice. In spite of a couple of blows and several kicks, he lay low and refused to budge.

The peasant laughed up his sleeve, as he said: “Oh dear, this animal must be sick! Whatever am I to do? His friend had better do his work today.” He then led the donkey out to the fields, put him in harness and made him work without a break right through till evening. The poor donkey paid the price for being such a loudmouth and wiseacre. He had a thousand opportunities to regret having put the ox in the know, but to what avail?

Evening came at last. The wretched donkey came back exhausted to the stable, where he found his pal as he had left him that morning, contentedly chewing the cud.

Placing a bale of straw in front of each animal, the peasant went out and eavesdropped on their conversation through a hole in the door. Looking angrily askance at the ox, the donkey was saying: “I’ve done my bit, friend. Tomorrow morning you’d better be ready for work.”

“Oh no,” the ox replied, “I’ve just got comfortable and I fully intend to relax like this for a few more days.”

Shaking his head knowingly, the donkey again offered his advice: “I wouldn’t think of playing this game again if I were you. When the people in the next field saw me being harnessed today instead of you, they asked our master about you and he said: ‘Our ox is sick. If he is no better tomorrow I shall have him slaughtered. He’s very lazy and I’m not going to feed him for nothing.’ So, you’ll find the butcher waiting for you if you pretend to be sick again tomorrow morning.”

When he heard these words, the poor ox lost his wits or rather came to his senses. Preferring to work than to die, he got up as soon as his master came into the stable and willingly set off for the fields.

As for the peasant, he was thinking to himself along the way: “How useful it is to know the language of animals. How valuable it has proved in these first two days alone. Who knows what else I shall learn and how I shall benefit from it?”

The next morning he woke as usual when the cock crowed, but this time he overheard the following conversation between the cock and the dog: “Congratulations,” the bird was saying: “There is going to be a banquet for you.”

“What banquet?” asked the dog.

“Our master’s ox is going to die. They will skin it and leave the meaty bones for you. Could there be a bigger feast than that?”

As soon as the peasant heard this conversation, he took his ox straight to market and sold it, supposing that he had avoided a great loss. The next morning after that, he jumped out of bed when he heard the cock and the dog conversing again. The dog was reproaching the cock: “What about that banquet, then? Look, they went and sold the ox you said was about to die.”

The cock now gave him a new story: “I told you there would be a banquet for you and you will certainly enjoy a feast. Our master did sell his ox, but today his slave will die and they will have to provide a funeral meal for friends and neighbors. The leftovers will make you a perfect banquet.”

On hearing this conversation, the peasant took his slave to market and sold him too. “Had I not been able to understand animal language,” he said, consoling himself, “I would have suffered a serious loss.” However, his peace and comfort were short-lived. He left all his work to listen to everything the animals were talking about. Since the slave had also been sold, the dog had been deprived of a second anticipated banquet and was accusing the cock of lying: “You sit there on your perch concocting a thousand and one falsehoods,” he said. “What happened to the banquet this time?”

“Is it any fault of mine?” said the cock in his own defense. “I said the ox would die and they went and sold it. I said the slave would die and they sold him. This time, however, our master himself will die and they are bound to

provide a meal for his children and neighbors. Don’t worry, you’ll get the feast you’ve been waiting for.”

The peasant wondered what had hit him. In great alarm and agitation he ran to the venerable Moses, told him everything that had happened and asked him what he ought to do.

“Why, in the first place, did you ask for something you did not really need?” said the venerable Moses. “The fate that now awaits you would have befallen your property and left you unscathed. If you had not understood the language of animals you would have remained in blissful ignorance. You would have lost your ox, but yourself you would have saved. Death is a just reward for one who seeks to obtain prosperity and security through the misfortunes of others.”

The peasant did in fact die, but not before learning that it cannot profit a man to know all there is to know in this world. Every story has its moral and the moral of this one is, to put it in a nutshell: some things it is better not to know than to know ... What is truly in our best interests is known only to Allāh, Exalted is He.

SIGNS OF THE HOUR OF DOOM

Although the exact time of the Resurrection is a mystery to us, the Holy Qur’ān describes its awful terrors and the final Prophet has told us of its signs. These are some of the Signs of the Hour of Doom:

There will be shortages, accompanied by insatiable greed. Modesty will disappear.

Obedience and kindness to parents will become a thing of the past; their children will treat them like slaves.

The fear of Allāh will be wiped from all hearts.

Hypocrisy will increase and homicide will be common.

Sinners will not try to hide their offences from public view.

Usury and the taking of interest will become commonplace.

The distinction between lawful and unlawful food will be ignored.

Illegitimacy will increase and will no longer be considered a handicap.

People will be respected for their money and wealth.

Flagrant sinners will raise their voices in society and in the mosques; such base and impudent people will get the better of honorable men.

Money held in trust will be treated like booty. The alms-due will not be paid. Men will become the obedient slaves of women.

Friends and acquaintances will be given more respect than parents.

Religious scholars will cease to practice what they preach. Statesmen will sin quite openly.

Respect will be accorded to wicked people, from fear of their mischief.

Men will be feared instead of Allāh; rather than being done for His sake, kindness will be inspired by the profit motive.

According to the noble °Alī, the blessed Prophet said: “A Time will come when nothing is left of Islam but the name, nothing of religion but the form, and nothing of the Qur’ān except learning by rote. They will build and restore their mosques, but these will be devoid of Allāh’s remembrance. The most evil people of that time will be their scholars: they will be a source of discord and it will rebound upon them. Such are the portents of the Resurrection.”

Women will acquire masculine characteristics, while men will become effeminate. In other words, sexual deviations will become increasingly common.

No attempt will be made to promote what is right and proper, while things forbidden by the Exalted Lord will be imposed by force.

A Zionist state will be established in Jerusalem.

The unbelievers will carve up the Muslim world among themselves.[2]

Finally, as the ultimate sign of the Resurrection, no home in Islam will be free of discord and every throat will have swallowed unlawful interest.

I wonder if these signs have not appeared already? What do your own eyes, ears, mind and understanding tell you? Come to repentance right away; do not wait for that awful moment of the Resurrection!

THIS WORLD IS A CARAVANSARY

The intellect with which we have been blessed has been given to us so that we may reflect upon Truth and Reality, know our Lord, find our God, be aware of our humanity and take pride therein, understand the reason for our creation and recognize our origin and goal. The heavens, the stars, the earth with its mountains, forests and plains, the oceans and rivers and all divine bounties—everything has been created for our benefit.

As for ourselves, we have been created for our Lord. This we must truly understand. Paradise is also for us, as are Hell, the Balance, the Interrogation, the Tomb, and the Hereafter. We alone have been created for the sake of Allāh, who says in a Sacred Tradition: “Mankind, I have created everything for you, but you, I have created and formed for Myself.”

We should recall that Ibrāhīm ibn Ad’ham was once the king of Khurāsān. One day the noble individual responsible for his spiritual instruction brought his camels into the royal palace. Ibrāhīm ibn Ad’ham was annoyed at having a caravan enter his great central court and he said to the spiritual guide (who appeared in the guise of chief caravaneer): “This is a royal palace, not an inn or caravansary!”

The spiritual guide replied: “Oh yes? I took it for a caravansary.” “Did you not hear me? I told you it was a royal palace.” “You are mistaken; it really is a caravansary. Where is your father? Where is your grandfather?” “They are both dead.” “You see, those who settle here a while eventually move on. In what way, then, does this differ from a caravansary? One day you will also go your way. I wonder what provision you have made?”

The King was a wise man. His conception had been good, as his destiny would surely be. These witty remarks made him realize that worldly life is really no different from a caravansary and he began to make provision for his journey to the Hereafter. In other words, by preferring the sovereignty of the heart to kingly sovereignty, he became Ibrāhīm Ad’ham, the Saint of God. He set up his throne in the hearts of mystics and lovers. Had he been content with worldly kingship, his name and fame would now be lost in the murky annals of history with thousands of other obscure rulers, if not completely forgotten. As it was, instead of sliding into history, he became the Sultan of Hearts. His blessed name was inscribed on the hearts of men and he became the crowning glory of Sufis and lovers.

The venerable Ibrāhīm Ad’ham was, indeed, well conceived. His father, a water-carrier by trade, was also a mystic, while his mother was a princess who believed in Providence.

How Ibrāhīm Ad’ham Became King of Khurāsān

In the region of Khurāsān there once ruled a very just king, whose daughter was exceptionally beautiful in every sense. Even though she was a princess, whose royal father would refuse her nothing, she led an unusually modest and secluded life, seldom leaving her apartment and constantly preoccupied with worship and devotion. While the princess remained in her splendid palace apartment, absorbed in worship, in a cave hollowed from the rock outside the city, a poor water-carrier named Ad’ham lived with a pious friend who was versed in the science of medicine. The two friends would come to the city by day to earn their livelihood. When they had obtained the sustenance allotted to them by the decree of Allāh, they would return to their cave, where they ate and drank, and passed their spare time in worship and devotion.

One day, as Ad’ham was distributing water from his water skin, he came unawares before the royal palace. He had filled the cup in his hand to give water to a traveler. Suddenly, he saw within the cup the image of a fabulous beauty with a face like the moon. Wondering what had happened to him, Ad’ham raised his head and looked up. There he beheld the king’s daughter looking down from her window, which she chanced to have opened that day. Smitten in his heart by the fire of love, he swooned and collapsed on the spot. The princess immediately realized that this was her fault. She prayed for forgiveness and vowed she would not open her window and look out again, but this came too late to help poor Ad’ham the water-carrier.

Feeling incapable of working any more that day, Ad'ham went straight back to his cave. Moaning and shedding tears of blood, he awaited the return of his friend, the doctor. Despite all the latter's counsel and advice, Ad'ham could not stem his tears. Each day he would pass before the palace in the hope of seeing that fabulous beauty once again. There he would wait till nightfall, when he would return, crying and sobbing, to his cave. When twenty days had elapsed in this fashion, the hopeless lover entered the city longing to see his beloved once more. Hearing the funeral call from the minarets and the market criers announcing the death of the king's only daughter, Ad'ham again fell faint. With enormous difficulty his friend bore him back to their cave.

While all the people mourned, the body of the princess was taken from the palace to be interred in a mausoleum that had been erected, by a strange coincidence, at the very mouth of the cave that sheltered Ad'ham and his friend. When everyone else had departed, the water-carrier recovered consciousness. When he learned what had happened, he implored his friend to help him open a passage from their cave into the princess' tomb, so that they could remove the coffin and enable him to quench the fire within him by looking, just once more, upon the face of his beloved. The doctor tried to dissuade him, but his efforts were in vain. Well aware of the risks involved, he finally agreed to the idea, saying: "We shall either lose our hides for friendship's sake or enable this poor wretch to achieve his desire."

The two friends set to work that very night. They dug while it was dark and secretly disposed of the loose rocks and earth during the daylight hours. On the seventh day, they finally tunneled through to the princess' tomb and carried her coffin to their cave through this underground passageway. When the doctor opened the coffin to let his friend see the girl's face, he detected signs of life in the poor young woman. Overjoyed and excited, he called to Ad'ham: "Quick, fetch me the bag in which I keep my instruments."

The water-carrier asked why this was necessary, for he was impatient to behold the beauty of his beloved. “Good news, Ad’ham!” the doctor cried. “There is a trace of life in the girl.”

He took a little blood from the arm of the supposedly dead girl, who began to stir an hour later as if waking from sleep. Eventually the princess opened her eyes, peered about her in bewilderment and asked where she was. The doctor reassured her and told her to rest awhile; she would learn the whole story later.

There were now three people living in the cave. Leaving Ad’ham to look after the girl, the doctor would go to the city each day. When he returned with whatever he had been able to earn, the three of them would eat and drink together. On the fourth day, the doctor saw that the poor girl was completely recovered, so he told her everything that had happened. He said that she was now ready to return to her father’s palace and asked her to forgive them if they had failed to take care of her properly during the time she had been with them. The girl was a righteous believer. After listening intently to the account of this adventure, she told them that she would remain in the cave with them instead of going back to her father’s palace. She explained that she could not show ingratitude to people who had treated her so very kindly, declaring that she would be content with her fate and that she would marry Ad’ham the water-carrier, who loved her so utterly. Since she had given this consent, the doctor married the princess and Ad’ham the water-carrier and so the lover was united with his beloved.

Day followed day, and month followed month. In due course the princess gave Ad’ham the water-carrier a son, whom they named Ibrāhīm. They

chose this name for the child because like Abraham [in Arabic: Ibrāhīm], on him be peace, he had been born in a cave.

Little Ibrāhīm became the joy, the hope, and the delight, in fact, the whole life of the cave as he grew to reach the age of seven. Each morning, at his mother's suggestion and with her encouragement, he would go to the city with his father and distribute water. Anyone who drank a cup of water from his blessed hand would ask for another and then pay two coins instead of one. In this way their earnings increased and their hardships eased. People liked Ibrāhīm so much and felt such affection for him that all who had seen him once wished to see him again. They would watch out for him as he made his rounds.

One day the king of Khurāsān noticed the unusually big crowd gathering around this young water-carrier. Having inquired about the reason for it, he ordered his men to bring the boy before him. The purity and sincerity in Ibrāhīm's face were so striking that the king suddenly forgot his grief for the princess. He decided to keep the young boy in the palace. He could not bear it, however, when little Ibrāhīm began weeping because he wanted to go back to his mother and father. The king summoned Ad'ham the water-carrier and instructed him to bring his son to the palace each morning and leave him there till evening.

Ibrāhīm soon became the sole diversion of the king and queen, their only consolation. While making him talk and laugh, they forgot their sad bereavement. One day they told him to bring his mother to the palace too. She tried her best to decline this invitation, but she could not resist her son's tearful insistence and was eventually obliged to accompany him to the palace. The king and queen were thrilled to set eyes upon such a replica of their daughter, who was dead and buried, but being so positive that she had

died, they could not admit the possibility that the woman before them might be their own daughter. Nevertheless they hugged her to their breasts.

King and queen alike took such a liking to Ibrāhīm and his mother and became so accustomed to them that they could no longer bear to part with them at night. However, they could not break their agreement with Ad'ham the water-carrier, so they had to endure this short separation with tears in their eyes. Finally, one night in the cave, the three companions of fate put their heads together and decided the time had come to tell the king and queen the facts. They acted on this decision the very next day. When they heard the amazing story from their daughter's mouth, the royal couple said: "O daughter, need we have suffered such distress all these eight years? Why did you not make yourself known to us?"

To this the princess replied: "It is because of Ad'ham that I am still alive. If you had not considered him a worthy partner for me, he would have fallen into great sorrow and despair. Besides, all in this fleeting world must sooner or later experience death. I chose not to cause you the same distress a second time, preferring to spend the rest of my life in worship and devotion in preparation for the Hereafter."

The king immediately ordered his son-in-law to be lodged in the palace also, but Ad'ham the water-carrier made it a condition of his acceptance that his friend, the doctor, be included. Thus they were all brought to live in the palace and lodged in their own apartments. Deciding that he was getting rather old, the king abdicated his crown and throne in favor of his grandson. That is how Ibrāhīm ibn Ad'ham came to be king of Khurāsān, the same who would later renounce his power and wealth, leaving himself with no more than a cloak and a cape, as poor as when he was born in the cave.

THE TEN PORTENTS

Some Companions of the blessed Prophet were once discussing the Resurrection. According to the venerable Hudhayfa al-Yamānī, the Messenger of Allāh said: “The Resurrection will not break until ten miraculous portents have been seen.” He then listed them as follows:

1). A smoke that will fill the earth.

2). The coming of the Antichrist [Dajjāl].

3). The appearance of the Beast of the Earth.

4). The sun’s rising in the West.

5). The second coming of the venerable Jesus, on him be peace.

6). The appearance of Gog and Magog.

7). The East shall be plunged in darkness.

8). The West shall be plunged in darkness.

9). The Arabian peninsula shall be plunged in darkness.

10). A fire shall break out in the Yemen, driving mankind to the Place of Resurrection.

Certain scholars maintain that these omens are symbolic, and that some or all of them have already appeared. For instance, darkness is the symbol of ignorance, in which the whole world is now plunged, having lost the knowledge of its Exalted Lord.

Harūn al-Rāshīd and the Five Unpredictables

One night in a dream, Harūn al-Rāshīd saw an imposing individual who identified himself as the Angel of Death. The Caliph asked him fearfully: “How much longer do I have to live?” By way of an answer, °Azrā’īl held up five fingers. Harūn awoke in terror, wondering whether the sign he had been shown meant five hours, five days, five weeks, five months or five years. In great alarm, he consulted the interpreters of dreams, but none of them would offer an interpretation. His curiosity grew more and more intense. At length, he got Queen Zubayda to consult Bahlūl, the Wise Fool. The venerable Bahlūl gave this response: “There is no cause for fear or concern. The sign given by the Angel of Death refers to the five unpredictables, knowledge of which is hidden from all but Allāh, unless there be some to whom He has made it available.” He then recited this glorious Verse:

Only Allāh has knowledge of the Hour; He sends down the rain, and knows what the wombs contain. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Surely Allāh is All-Knowing, All-Aware. [31:34]

According to °Abdullāh ibn °Umar, the blessed Messenger of Allāh recited this noble Verse after saying: “Five things are unpredictable, known only to Allāh, Exalted is He.”

The Angel of Death is Surprised to See a Man in Jerusalem.

A man was sitting beside the venerable Solomon when °Azrā’īl came and gave him a look that filled him with fear and dread. When Solomon told him it was the Angel of Death, the man said: “O Prophet of Allāh, I am very much afraid of him. Send me away to China so that I can be as far away form him as possible.”

The venerable Solomon commanded the wind to carry that man away to China. A little later, °Azrā’īl came back and Solomon asked him: “Why did you give that man such a look when you came here a while ago?”

The Angel of Death replied: “I was under orders to take that man’s soul from him in China, so I was surprised to see him sitting beside you in Jerusalem. Anyway, he asked you to send him to China and you granted his wish. I then went to China myself and there, in compliance with my orders, I took away his soul.”

Indeed, we do not know when, where or how we are going to die. Death may catch us committing a sin or performing an act of worship. In any case, we must go to meet the Lord. How would it be for us should we suddenly die unrepentant? Our blessed Master used to say: “I make repentance a hundred times a day.” Do we repent and feel remorse for our sins even once?

Hajjāj Admonishes the People of °Irāq

When Yūsuf al Thaqafī, better known as al-Hajjāj, came to Kūfa, he entered the mosque, mounted the pulpit, praised and extolled Allāh and pronounced benedictions on the blessed Prophet, then he addressed this speech to the people of °Irāq:

“O People of °Irāq, I have laid down my sword. I hear that you have been praying for my defeat and destruction. In fact, your prayers will go unaccepted, and I shall not perish. Even if I did, do you imagine that my death would save you? The Exalted Lord would certainly subject you to someone yet more cruel than myself. There are tyrants far more cruel than I. Be sure that they would follow me and make you wish you could have me back. Give up these bad habits of yours. Give up your sin and disobedience so that the All-Glorious One may soften my hard heart and fill it with justice and mercy. Be like the Prophet’s Companions, so that I may be your °Umar ibn al-Khattāb. Otherwise, if you persist in this treachery and wickedness, I see many beards dripping with blood.”

The Rosebush Presented to the Caliph by Charlemagne

The emperor Charlemagne presented a sapling rosebush to Harūn al-Rāshīd, the °Abbāsid Caliph, who had it planted in his private garden. He ordered his gardener to treat this precious sapling with the greatest possible care and attention and to bring him the first rose to flower on it.

The sapling took root and, in due course, produced a bud which opened into a magnificent rose. Just as the gardener was on the point of picking the flower, he saw a nightingale flying over it, singing sadly. As he was gazing at this scene, the nightingale made an unexpected swoop and attacked the rose with its beak and wings, scattering petals all around.

The gardener ran panting to tell the Caliph exactly what had happened and begged his forgiveness. The sultan reassured him, saying, “Don’t worry about it. What has happened has happened. You are certainly not to blame. I pardon you. Gardener, this world is a place where we cannot get away with anything, so that nightingale will get its just deserts.”

Time went by until one day, as he was working in the private garden, the gardener saw the nightingale that had destroyed the priceless rose being eaten by a snake. He ran at once to report this to the Caliph. “Sire, you have performed a miracle. The nightingale has met the fate you predicted. I have just seen it being eaten by a snake.”

The Caliph smiled as he said: “Gardener, as I told you, no one gets away with anything in this world; whatever we do, it will eventually catch up with us. The snake that has eaten the nightingale will also get its just deserts.”

More time elapsed. The snake that had eaten the nightingale came slithering through the grass and coiled around the gardener's feet. He killed it with the sharp edge of the spade he was carrying, then raced off to tell the Caliph what had happened. Again, the Caliph smiled as he said: "Indeed, gardener, this will catch up with you, too"

Later still, the gardener committed a serious offense, incurred the Caliph's wrath, and was handed over to the executioner. When they asked him if he had a last wish to make, he said: "My only last request it to have a word with the Caliph."

This was reported to the sultan, who had the gardener brought before him and asked him what he wanted to say.

"Sire," said the gardener, "Surely you must remember. You gave me a rose sapling to plant and commanded me to bring you its first flower. The rose had just reached perfection and I was on the very point of picking it when the nightingale clawed it to pieces. When I reported this to you, you said: 'the nightingale will get its just deserts.' In no time at all, that nightingale was swallowed by a snake. When I again reported to you, you said: 'the snake will also get its just deserts.' That snake wound itself around my foot and when I told you that I had killed it, you said: 'This will catch up with you.' Everything has come true and now you have handed me over to the executioner to punish my offense, so I shall not get away with it either. However, my sultan, do not forget that what you are doing now will also catch up with you. As you told me, it is that kind of world. Just wait three or four days."

Harūn al-Rāshīd saw reason. Acknowledging the truth of these words, he acted as befitted a sultan and pardoned the gardener.

The noble Imām Husayn, martyr of Karbalā' and king of all martyrs, said: "A generous man is one who gives without being asked. A magnanimous man is one who pardons when it lies within his power to take revenge."

Human beings certainly cannot escape the consequence of what they do. It may be sooner or later, in this world or the Hereafter, but our deeds will surely find us out. This applies not only to human beings but even to animals ...

If we are wise and intelligent we will say: "I did it and now it has caught up with me."

"LENDING ALLĀH A GOODLY LOAN"

Remember Allāh at all times and never forget him. If we do not forget Him, we shall fear Him. To those who fear Him and love Him, all things will be taught:

Be aware of Allāh, for it is Allāh who teaches you. [2:282]

To the extent that you fear Him, you will draw near to Him and be guided to the right path:

Guidance for the righteous ... [2:2]

If you achieve right guidance and perfect your faith in Him, although you do not see him, you will never forget that He sees you everywhere always. You will perform your prayers carefully and lovingly, for you will know and see and experience ritual prayer as the believer’s Ascension, the lover’s crowning glory and the light of the Messenger’s eye. To please Allāh, you will distribute part of what you earn among His creatures. You will circumambulate the Ka°ba of the heart, for the House of the All-Merciful is Man. Heaven and earth cannot contain Allāh, the Lord of Glory, yet He manifests Himself to the hearts of His believing servants. To put alms in the outstretched hand of a beggar is like putting them in the hand of God.

... and who lend Allāh a goodly loan ... [57:18]

It is clear form this Noble Verse that any assistance rendered to the believers is rendered directly to Allāh. Similarly, any treachery directed at the believers is aimed at Him. He is utterly unaffected by any good or evil done toward Him. The worth of a human being in the sight of Allāh is therefore made abundantly plain by the glorious Verse we have just cited. Let us awake!

In a Persian poem, the venerable Jāmī says: “To make one heart happy is greater than making the Pilgrimage. To make one heart happy is more meritorious than building a thousand Ka°ba’s. For, while the Ka°ba was built by the Prophet Abraham, the heart is built by Allāh, and the believing heart is the place where He is manifest.”

The meaning of these lines is truly immense and most profound. Let us just consider the enormous importance of the Ka°ba. How many noble beings have visited that sacred station since the time of Abraham, on him be peace! Those who have worshipped there include the final Prophet, the chief of all Prophets and leader of the saints, the Messenger to men and jinn, the venerable Muhammad Mustafā who is a mercy to the eighteen thousand worlds and the reason for the creation of the universe. Between the nearby hills of Safā and Marwa lie fifty-two Prophets, while the venerable Ishmael is buried at the spot called al-Khātam. Numbered among those who have pressed their blessed faces against the revered Ka°ba are: Abū Bakr, chief of the veracious ones; °Umar, the most just of the just; °Uthmān, whose modesty made the angels jealous; °Alī the Lion of Allāh, and Hamza, the Lion of His Messenger; Hasan and Husayn, the Princes of Paradise; the Messenger's own daughter Fātima; Hudhayfa al-Yamānī, the Messenger's confidant; the Ten who were promised Paradise; the greatest of the Noble Companions; and many saints and other righteous, devout, wise and perfect men. We should also mention the blessed Prophet's wives and children, as well as the children of °Alī, the Elect, all the Imāms and the Cardinal Saints: °Abd al-Qādir Geylānī, Ahmad al-Rifā°ī, Ahmad al-Badawī, Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī, Hasan al-Shādhilī, Sa°d al-Dīn al-Jibāwī, °Abd al Salām al-Asmar, Abū-l Madyan al-Maghribī, Muhyi'l Dīn °Arabī, Mevlana Jālal al-Din Rūmī, Molla Jāmī, Muhammad Bahā' al-Dīn al-Naqshbandī and countless other founding saints and noble individuals, all of whom prostrated themselves in worship at this sacred spot, toward which Muslims everywhere turn their faces when they pray.

Is it possible to imagine a more sublime and sanctified station anywhere on earth? Is not the revered Ka°ba the All-Merciful's House of Worship, the first ever built for mankind? Indeed it is; we may say without doubt or hesitation, that there exists no place or station superior to it. Nevertheless, a human being pleasing to Allāh is more excellent than the Ka°ba with all its special qualities; for the Ka°ba is the work of Abraham while a human being is the work of Allāh.

The human heart is the place of divine manifestation. If the Exalted Lord had not created mankind, there would have been no need for Paradise or hell, for the Ka°ba or this world itself, for the Hereafter, for the Book; for the Balance or the Reckoning. In the Sacred Tradition, the Exalted One says: “O Mankind, I have created the whole universe for you and I have created you for Myself.”

The seasons, the sun the moon, earth, air and water, all that we see or do not see, know or do not know, are in a state of constant motion or activity. Just as a fish knows nothing about water, the element in which it lies, we cannot grasp the fact that all manifold bounties and blessing that surround us have been created and brought into existence for our benefit. Moreover, it was from among mankind that the Lord of Majesty chose His Beloved. Man is therefore the greatest being after God. Even the angels were created to serve man. Gabriel was made responsible for bringing down revelation; Michael for the allocation of sustenance; Isrāfīl for blowing the Trumpet, for the wind and rain and similar duties; °Azrā’īl for taking away souls.

When man was first created, all the angels were commanded to prostrate them selves before Adam:

And when we said to the angels: ‘Prostrate yourselves before Adam,’ they fell prostrate, all but Iblīs. He refused in his pride and became one of the unbelievers. [2:34]

BEING HUMAN IN FACT, AS WELL AS IN FORM

If man had not been created, it would have been unnecessary to give the angels these duties...

If we are to be human, in fact, and not merely in form, we must know what it means to be human. We cannot be true human beings unless we obey the commandments of Allāh, and avoid what He has forbidden; unless we firmly embrace the Holy Qur'ān and imbue ourselves with divine attributes. Those who steep themselves in the Qur'ān, and see through its eyes, will come to recognize truth and reality, to distinguish darkness and light. They will reflect on the inevitable consequences of all their actions, good or bad, and will conduct themselves accordingly. For they will know that their Exalted Lord is aware of everything they do, sees and hears all things and is immune to forgetfulness and heedlessness. Knowing this, they must surely believe that they will be called to account and made to see what they have done ...

For wrongdoers who pay the penalty in this world, there is no punishment in the Hereafter. The All-Glorious One is Just. It does not befit His Majesty to inflict a double punishment. In the case of certain unbelievers, however, the punishment they encounter in this world continues with them into the Hereafter. These are sinners and wrongdoers whose punishment has been brought forward by Allāh, the Exalted Lord.

If the believer is innocent of any offense or sin and yet meets with suffering, misfortune or disaster, he will thereby rise to higher degree. If he meets with misfortune after doing something wrong, he thereby expiates the sin he has committed.

If a believer sins but follows his sin with sincere repentance and good works, and then no misfortune befalls him, this is a sign that he has been

favored with divine pardon. As Allāh says in the Holy Qur’ān:

The good deeds take away the evil deeds. [11:114]

If a person sins, yet neither repents nor makes amends, nor does good works, but nevertheless suffers no misfortune, we must realize that his case has been postponed until the Day of Judgment. He will be called to account at the Resurrection, when he will pay the penalty for what he has done.

Repentance is not enough when the rights of men—especially non-Muslims—or the rights of animals are violated. In these cases it is absolutely essential to make amends.

The Fish and the Olive Oil: A Tale of Reward & Expiation

Two angels happened to meet as they were going down to earth to carry out the divine commands they had received. One said to the other: “I have been given a strange task. An unbeliever is about to breathe his last. He is longing for a particular kind of fish, but the fish he wants is not to be found in his part of the world. The Exalted One has commanded me to take part of the ocean where that kind of fish lives and transfer it to the sea near the home of that unbeliever. He will then taste the fish before he dies.”

The second angel claimed his task was even stranger: “It seems there is a believer who, for forty years, has longed to eat a dish cooked with olive oil. He is now on the point of death. Another believer is apparently cooking him

this very dish for which he has been yearning. Well, I am to spill that olive oil and so prevent that dying believer from eating the dish he so desires."

A third angel had overheard the conversation and he offered the following explanation: "The tasks you have been set are not so strange at all. The unbeliever, who is now dying, once did something good. Since he has no share in the Hereafter, he has been granted the fish his heart desires so that he may enjoy in this world the reward for his good deed. Divine justice requires that this be done. In other words, he will receive his reward in this world and nothing will be due to him in the Hereafter. As for the believer, he committed a sin for which he has yet to pay the price. The olive oil will be spilled and he will be deprived of the meal he desires. This misfortune will be an expiation for his outstanding sin."

Zühtü Pasha Rescues an Ant

Zühtü Pasha, the author of a religious textbook used in the old secondary schools, held office in the Ottoman Ministries of Education, Finance and Public Works. He built the noble mosque which bears his name in Kızıltoprak. While the mosque was under construction, Zühtü Pasha never failed to stop by the site each morning on his way to the Sublime Porte and on his way home each evening. He followed the progress of the work and kept it under control.

One morning he was visiting the site as usual and saw that the workmen were busy slaking lime. Noticing an ant on the hot lime, he rescued it with his stick and left it in a safe corner.

That night he had a dream in which he heard a voice say: “Zühtü, I had not accepted the mosque you are building, but I have pardoned you because you have rescued My ant.”

After this dream Zühtü Pasha praised and extolled his Lord. He did not visit the construction site again until the mosque was complete, explaining to those who wondered why: “I have proof that I have been pardoned by my Lord.”

Hell was displayed to our blessed Master during his Ascension. There he saw a woman turning over and over in the flames. He asked Gabriel why this woman had deserved such a punishment and he received this reply: “O Messenger of Allāh, she is suffering like this because she allowed a cat to die of hunger.”

The Sultan’s Mother Rescues a Kitten

The venerable Bezm-i-âlem, Queen Mother of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülaziz, was the founder of the Ortaköy Mosque and the Valide Hospital, for the upkeep of which she left pious endowments.

This revered Queen Mother was caught in a violent rainstorm as she was going somewhere one day. The sudden downpour flooded the city streets with torrents. Seeing a kitten swept away by the current, she halted her carriage and ordered the coachman to rescue the little creature. She took it with her in the carriage, dried it and fed it.

That night she had a dream in which she received the good news: “We had not accepted the mosque and hospital you have had constructed, but you have been blessed with pardon because you rescued the kitten.”

Great works of charity, like the founding of mosques and hospitals, constitute ongoing alms. When a person dies, the record of his deed is closed and no further entries, whether good or bad, are written there. An exception is made, however, in the case of those responsible for great charitable work like these, i.e. for ongoing alms. Their records are kept open as long as people continue to enjoy the benefit of their mosques and other foundations.

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“WHEN THE TRUMPET SHALL SOUND …”

Just as we shall experience our individual resurrection, the universal Resurrection must surely come. Everyone will be called to account and asked about the good and evil he has done. One day the Trumpet will be blown:

On the day the Trumpet is blown, and terror seizes those in the heavens and those on earth, except for whom Allāh wills, and all come humbly unto Him. [27:87]

The force of the Trumpet blast will cause an earthquake unlike any the world has ever known: the Earthquake of the Resurrection. People will reel,

bewildered and perplexed. Pregnant women will abort and the earth will turn inside out. Mothers will throw their suckling infants to the ground. The horror of that Day will turn black hair white and youngsters into old men. Mothers and fathers will forget their own children. Children will forget their parents. Each person will be preoccupied with himself to the exclusion of all else.

That time will surely come. We must not let the distractions of worldly life make us forgetful of Allāh, Exalted is He, and the Day of Reckoning.

When the Trumpet has blown, Heaven and all therein—sun, moon, stars and earth—all will be destroyed. All creatures will die. The sole survivors will be Gabriel, Michael, Isrāfīl, °Azrā'īl, and the Bearers of the Throne. Obedient to Allāh, the Angel of Death will then take the souls of other angels. The Glorious and Exalted Lord will ask him if no living being remains and °Azrā'īl will say: "O Lord, You know. Nothing is hidden from You. Only this poor impotent servant of Yours remains."

Allāh, who is Ever-Living and will never die, will say: "Did you not hear My words:

Every soul shall taste death. [3:185]

"Now it is your turn. Take your own soul." When he receives this order, the Angel of Death will go to a station midway between Paradise and Hell. There, as he is taking his own soul, he will utter such a cry as would scare the life out of all creatures had there been any still alive.

While uttering this cry, °Azrā’īl will say: “If I had known that death was so painful, violent and bitter, I would have gone gently when taking away the souls of believers.” Ultimately, °Azrā’īl will die and no being will remain except Allāh, Exalted is He. The world will be left desolate for forty years and the Ever-lasting Lord will say to it: “O vile world, where are your Pharaohs and Nimrods with their claims to divinity? Where are those deviants who boasted: ‘I am king and sovereignty is mine?’ Where now are those denying traitors? Where are the armies, goods, thrones and palaces in which they placed their trust? Where are those who worshipped others instead of Me, although they consumed My substance? where are those who refused to believe in Me? Where are those who said: ‘I am your Lord most high,’ and denied the Resurrection? Look, there is no one to give an answer. Whose is the kingdom, I wonder: yours or Mine? I created you from a drop of sperm. With My Almighty brush, I painted you in your mother’s womb. You knew neither your origin nor your destiny, yet you behaved ungratefully as if you would never die. Where are you now: to whom do all things belong?

... To Allāh, the One, the Triumphant.” [40:16]

After this, the Exalted One will send a barren wind to level the whole earth. Neither mountain nor valley will remain; all will be flattened out:

You will see there neither curve nor ruggedness. [20:107]

Finally, Allāh will command the sky to rain and for forty days the rain of life will fall. The waters will rise to a height of twelve cubits and human

bodies will sprout from the ground like plants. All these bodies will be complete with limbs and organs like those in the present world.

He will first bring to life the angels who are the Bearers of the Throne, then Isrāfīl, then Michael, then °Azrā'īl, and then Gabriel. These four angels He will send to Paradise, saying: "O My angels, the first to be resurrected is My Muhammad. I shall first resurrect my Beloved. Go to Paradise and fetch the heavenly steed My Beloved shall ride, the belt with which he shall be girded, the robes he shall wear and the crown that shall be set upon his head."

Ridwān, the Angel of Paradise, will receive his orders and a heavenly steed, a crown, a celestial robe and the Banner of Praise will be handed over to Gabriel. Gabriel will halt midway between Heaven and earth, asking: "Earth, where is the tomb of Muhammad, on him be peace:" The Earth will reply: "I swear by Allāh who has sent you, that I do not know. The wind that blew has scattered me to pieces so I cannot tell where it may be." At that moment, Allāh will raise a beam of light from the tomb of the noble Glory of the Universe. When that light reaches heaven it will flood the whole cosmos. Gabriel will descend, weeping, toward that light and when the angels ask him the reason for his tears, he will say: "How could I do otherwise than weep? The Messenger will now ask me about his Community. What shall I tell him?"

Just as he arrives, with these thoughts in mind, at the blessed resting place of our Master, the tomb of Muhammad will shudder and burst asunder. Our Master will emerge, shaking the dust from his blessed head, and look about him to his right and left. Failing to see any building or habitation on the face of the earth, he will turn to Gabriel, Michael, Isrāfīl and °Azrā'īl, as they stand in line before him, and will say: "O Gabriel, what day is it today?"

“O Messenger of Allāh, Gabriel will reply, “today is the day of remorse. Today is the day of regret. Today is the day of Resurrection. Today is the Day of Intercession.”

Our blessed Master will then inquire: “Where is my Community? Can you have come here to me and left them on the brink of Hell?” Receiving the reply: “O Messenger of Allāh, I have brought you a heavenly steed, a robe of honor, a girdle and a standard from Paradise.” Our blessed Master will reply: “I want neither steed nor robe nor girdle nor crown. Only my Community ... Only my Community ... Give me news of my Community, O Gabriel.”

W hen the Messenger of Allāh hears that he is the first to be gathered up, he will set the blessed crown upon his head, don the robe of Paradise, gird himself with the belt and mount the heavenly steed, as he asks Gabriel: “My brother Gabriel, where is my Friend of the Cave? Where are my Companions and Helpers? Where are Abū Bakr, °Umar, °Uthmān and °Alī?”

When His refined Beloved expresses his wish and desire, the Lord of Glory will bring these four Companions to life and these noble beings will also be provided with heavenly steeds and robes of Paradise. Wearing these robes, they will ride their steeds into the presence of the Messenger. Dismounting from his celestial steed, our blessed Master will fall in prostration, weeping as he beseeches his Lord and pleads: “My Community ... my Community.”

The All-Glorious Lord, unable to resist the entreaty from his refined Beloved, will command Isrāfīl to blow upon the Trumpet once again:

Then another blast will be blown, at which they will get up and look around. [39:68]

When Isrāfīl blows this second blast of the Trumpet, the souls of mankind will buzz about like bees between Heaven and earth and each soul will enter its own body. All divine creatures will arise and be driven to the Place of Resurrection. Mankind will rise from the tomb in three groups: to give account to Allāh, Exalted is He.

1. The first group will arise from their graves to find heavenly steeds awaiting them. They will don the celestial robes sent from Paradise at God's command and will rejoice in heavenly food provided for them. To add to their happiness they will receive the congratulations of the angels at their service. With such honor and dignity, they will be ushered to the Place of Resurrection to find themselves in the shade of the Throne, beneath the Banner of Praise and close to the Prince of the Universe.

Of these the angels will say: "These worthy beings are the righteous ones who were the saints of Allāh during their lives on earth. For them there is neither fear nor sadness. Although the Plain of °Arasāt is a fearful place, they shall know no fear. Although the Place of Resurrection is a place of remorse and lamentation, they shall neither grieve nor lament. Unlike the rest, they will neither beat their breasts nor groan and sigh, for they have been granted the approval of the all Merciful and have attained eternal bliss."

2. The second group will consist of sinful Muslims who will arise naked from their tombs and will make their way barefoot, hungry and thirsty, to

the Place of Resurrection.

3. The third group will be made up of the unbelievers and the dissolute. Angels with whips of fire will drive them forcibly to the Place of Resurrection, as they drag their faces along the ground like serpents. These treacherous, obdurate, wrongful and arrogant prodigals were stubborn in their unbelief, closed their eyes to the Word of God, rejected all good advice, persecuted the believers and reviled them. Now they will crawl beneath the lash to the Place of Resurrection. The lackeys that followed them will suffer the same treatment and undergo the same torment ...

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Paradise and Hell are bought in this World. As they say, this world is the seedbed of the Hereafter. As we sow here, we shall reap there ...

Adorn your tongue with divine remembrance. Constantly affirm the Divine Unity. Urge yourself and others to goodness, to faith, to the service of your Exalted Lord. If you cannot do good, at least do not do evil. If you cannot speak well, at least hold your tongue from foul and ugly speech. If you have failed to improve yourself, improve your wife and children. If you can do this you will be like a burning candle; you will melt away yourself, but those around you will benefit from your light ... Recognize that everything beautiful and good is from Allāh, while all that is bad and ugly is from yourself. Even if you commit one hundred thousand sins, do no lose hope of Allāh, Exalted is He. He is Compassionate, He is Pardoning, He is Forgiving, He is the Veiler of faults ...

Allāh, You spread the earth beneath our feet and raise the sky above us, do not part us from Your Beloved. Keep us ever in the company of the righteous who enjoy Your good pleasure. Just as You granted us here the honor and blessing to be a Community for Your Beloved, let us dwell beside that Mercy to all mankind on the coming Day of Resurrection. Make us Your servants. Let us rejoice in serving You. Let us not be proud of our service. Let us live as believers and die as believers ...

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In honor of the Chief of the Messengers and all their families ...

NOTES

[1]Some thoughtless people ask: “Why hide from other men what is known to Allāh?” In fact, if everybody knew what Allāh knows about us, none of us could look each other in the eye. Fortunately, Allāh, Glorified and Exalted is He, has drawn a veil over many of our faults. Were it unnecessary to conceal from men that which is known to Allāh, why would we need houses, walls, windows and curtains, not to mention underwear?

Another point worth mentioning in this context: the veiling of women in Islam is for their protection against lascivious glances, not because they are inclined to wantonness.

[2]When the Most Noble Messenger made this miraculous prediction, his pure Companions asked: “O Messenger of Allāh, will there be a single

Muslim left?" Our blessed Master replied: "They will be like grains of sand, numbered in millions, but they will be enamored of worldly life and will have no fear of death, for they will have lost their purity of faith, the vigor of Islam, the valor of men and jinn, and their zeal for the clear religion."

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH DISCOURSE

Mysteries of the “Forenoon and Night”

Bismi’llāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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By the bright forenoon; / and by the night when it is still! / Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does He hate you. / The Last shall be better for you than the first. / Your Lord shall give to you, and you shall be satisfied. [93:1-5].

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INTERPRETATION OF SŪRAT AD-DUHĀ

These glorious Verses were revealed on the following occasion: Shortly after our Master, the Most Noble Messenger, had announced his prophetic mission, discussion and controversy became rife among the unbelievers of Quraysh. In order to find out whether our blessed Master really was a Prophet they decided to consult the Jewish scholars of Medina. In particular, they wished to learn from these scholars the marks and signs of Prophethood.

To this end, a committee of five leading members of Quraysh was dispatched to Medina. The hoped-for meeting took place and the delegation explained the reason for their visit by saying: “In Mecca, Muhammad ibn °Abdullāh of the clan of Hāshim has split our tribe by claiming that he is a Prophet. It is quite true that Muhammad has never been known to tell a lie, but how can we ascertain whether or not he really is what he claims to be? What is the mark of a Prophet?”

The Jewish scholars replied: “Prophets are associated with miracles. They manifest extraordinary things that would be impossible for ordinary people.”

“Yes indeed,” said the members of the delegation, “certain extraordinary things have been manifested by Muhammad. Just as you say, these things would really be impossible for ordinary people. All the same, they could very well be sorcery. How can we distinguish between that and the miracles peculiar to the Prophets?”

“We shall draw up three questions for you,” said the Jewish scholars. “Put these three questions to him. If he gives an answer to each of the three, you will know that he is not a Prophet. If he answers two of the questions, but not the third, you must acknowledge him as a genuine Prophet.”[1]

As soon as the emissaries got back to Mecca, they put the three questions to our Master, the Glory of the Universe, who asked them to return the next day as he would have to wait for the divine revelation. For some mysterious reason he omitted to add: “If Allāh wills [in shā’a-llāh],” after saying: “I shall reply.”

Twelve or fifteen days[2] went by, but no divine revelation came. The unbelievers of Quraysh were delighted by the apparent cessation of the divine revelation, which encouraged those sick and prejudiced people to mock and goad our Master, saying: “Muhammad has been abandoned by the Lord he trusted so much. The love between them must have turned to hatred, for they have parted company.” The blessed heart of Muhammad, that absolute mirror and manifestation-place of the Creator, was sorely grieved. His illumined heart was filled with sorrow. The dust of reproach had settled on that noble and blessed heart, the mirror of Truth. To wipe

away this dust from the pure heart of His Beloved, the Lover sent down this glorious Verse:

Never say about anything: I am going to do that tomorrow,' without adding: 'If Allāh wills.' [18:25]

These divine words teach us that we must say: "If Allāh wills" whenever we embark on something. The Glorified and Exalted Lord addresses His command to His refined Beloved, but it certainly applies to us as well. Of course, it must be so; what can a creature do if the Exalted One does not wish it to be done? Only He is absolutely Independent and Free of all control. According to another account, something hurt our Master's blessed toe so that it bled continuously. Because of the bleeding, our Master was unable to get up for his prayers for two or three nights and could not offer his humble worship and supplication to his Lord.

The wife of Abū Lahab, one of the envious tyrants, entered the Prophetic presence and expressed her hostility and hatred in these mocking words: "O Muhammad, for three nights you have not worshipped your Lord. Has He abandoned you or have you forsaken Him?" If a man is abandoned by his Lord, he cannot worship Him, but it is not by his own will that a creature forsakes his Lord. It is Allāh alone who 'leads whom He will to guidance or to error.'

This was extremely painful for our blessed Master to listen to and he became very anxious and distressed. It was to relieve His Beloved of this distress that the All-Glorious One revealed the Verse: "By the bright forenoon!" Allāh is saying: "O My refined Beloved, I swear by that time of morning when you were born, that your Lord has not forgotten you and is not angry with you."

This oath is being sworn by none other than Allāh, the Sole and Absolute Owner of the entire universe, of all that exists in heaven and earth, known or unknown, visible and invisible.

What is He swearing by? By the forenoon, the birth-time of His Beloved, to whom He said: “But for you, I would not have created this universe,” and to whom He declared, for the benefit of all His creatures: “I have sent you as a Mercy to all Mankind.

Why? Because by his birth, the darkness of unbelief and error was dispersed and the light of divine unity and guidance radiated to the eighteen thousand worlds. The early forenoon was the time of the birth of Allāh’s Messenger. It was at that blessed time that the Venerable Moses conversed with the Exalted Lord. It is the time when lovers achieve union, the time when divine grace is overflowing ... That is why the Glorious and Exalted Lord swears by that time.[3]

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The “bright forenoon” in this oath, sworn by the Lord of Majesty, also means the light of the pure countenance of Muhammad, whose beauty possessed an exquisite radiance more perfect than that of the sun. Even at dead of night, those who were in the presence of our blessed Master needed neither the sun’s rays nor the light of the moon, for he was a mighty lantern of Truth:

And as one who calls to Allāh by His leave, and as a light-giving lamp. [33:46]

The entire universe emanated from that light, the Light of Allāh and His Ultimate Messenger. That radiant lamp was Light upon Light:

Allāh is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His light is like a niche in which there is a lamp—the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star. It is lit from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost shine though no fire touched it. Light upon light! Allāh guides to His Light whom He will, and Allāh coins parables for mankind, for Allāh has knowledge of all things. [24:35]

The noble authors of the great commentaries on the Qur'ān are convinced that this is an allegory for our Master, the blessed Messenger of Allāh. The niche represents his blessed breast, while the brilliant lamp stands for his pure heart, lit by the oil from the Tree of Prophethood.

Just as the All-Glorious and Exalted One swears in this Verse by Ahmad's pure countenance, in Sūrat al-Hijr, He swears by the life of our blessed Master:

"By your life, [O Muhammad!]" [15:72]

Allāh has not sworn by the life of any Prophet apart from His refined Beloved.

Returning to our interpretation of Sūrat al-Duhā: after swearing by the light of His Beloved's pure countenance, the Exalted One swears:

"And by the night when it is still!" [93:2]

BLESSEDNESS OF NIGHT VIGIL

The night encompasses great benefits. It is a special time for faithful lovers and a time to seek pardon for sins. The night is a time for friends to beg forgiveness in intimate communion. The night draws a veil over faults and does not disclose what it conceals. It is a cloak for those who are acquainted with Allāh, Exalted is He. It is the time of union for those who love their Lord. Night is a covering for lovers. It is the occasion for spiritual love and supplication.

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It is very significant that night should be mentioned after the forenoon. Night was the time of our blessed Master's Ascension and it was at night that he attained the rank of the Two Bow-Lengths. On that night of his Ascension thousands of mysteries were disclosed to him. During his communion with his Lord, he responded to the divine greeting: "O Mustafā, O My Beloved," with: "Doubly at Your service, O Lord of All the Worlds!"

For the sake of our instruction, he then heard himself addressed by the Almighty: “O My Beloved, do not incline your noble heart to this world with its pomp and show. I have not created this world as your permanent abode. Worldly life is nothing but a marketplace, which I have created so that knowledge of Allāh may be acquired. This world is the field of the Hereafter. What is sown in the former is reaped in the latter.”

The All-Glorious Lord was saying to his Beloved: “Your heart is sound. Do not remove that noble heart from Me; do not become attached to anything other than Me. I am Your Supreme Goal in this world and the Next. To Me you shall return again. O My Beloved Muhammad, devote your nights not to sleep but to My worship and service. Arise and perform the prayer of Night Vigil [tahajjud] which is very dear to Me. Those who pray at night enjoy My support and favor. If a person recites the noble Sūra Yā Sīn during his vigil-prayer in the heart of the night, I shall grant that servant of Mine support and salvation in this world and the Hereafter. I shall accept his supplications immediately and cause him to achieve and attain his every wish.”

The venerable Moses said to his Lord while communing with Him upon Mount Sinai: “O Lord, let me know the time at which supplications are speedily accepted, so that I may choose that time to offer my pleas and requests to you.” He then received this response from the Almighty: “O My Converser, offer your prayers to me at the time of Night Vigil, for at that time I accept supplications offered to Me, pardon sins and do not withhold My forgiveness from those who seek it.”

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The lover who holds up his palms in Night Vigil will not go empty-handed. During Night Vigil a cure is granted for every ailment, a remedy for every illness. During Night Vigil many jewels are bought from the market of Truth. During Night Vigil the sleepless eye sees the Truth. During Night Vigil the sleepless eye is truly with the Truth. During the Night Vigil union is achieved and forgiveness received. During Night Vigil God's approval is attained.

Do not sleep, especially in the time of vigil before dawn! The time is very near at hand when you shall have a long, long sleep ...

Salvation of an Idolater Who Kept Vigil

Once, in the time before dawn, the Glorious and Exalted Lord gave this command to His angel: "O Gabriel, go down to earth and make a tour of that region. If you find anyone awake at this time of vigil bestow My grace upon him."

Gabriel surveyed the whole earth as he had been commanded to do, but the only person he could find awake was a Zoroastrian who had been a fire-worshipper for ninety years. The old man stood facing the fire as he performed his peculiar rites of worship. "O idol, O idol [yā sanam]," he was repeating.

When Gabriel had returned to his station, he reported: "My Lord, 1failed to find anyone awake apart from a Zoroastrian polytheist. The rest of mankind were sound asleep."

“O Gabriel,” came the divine Command, “go and confer My grace upon that Zoroastrian.”

All his life that fire-worshipper had been addressing the object of his worship with the words: “O idol, O idol [yā sanam],” but the moment Gabriel brought him the divine grace, he began to recite: “O Everlasting One, O Everlasting One [yā Samad].”

In response, the All-Glorious One called to him: “At your service, at your service [Labbayk].”

“My Lord,” asked Gabriel, “this polytheist has been attributing partners to You for ninety years; for what mysterious reason did you answer him with ‘At your service’ when he addressed You twice with ‘O Everlasting One’?”

The Lord of Majesty replied: “This Zoroastrian had been calling ‘O idol [yā sanam] for ninety years without ever getting a response from the fire. If I had not responded when he called upon Me with ‘O Everlasting One [yā Samad]’, how would I have differed from the idol? I am the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting, and I have endowed that servant of Mine with faith.”

WHY REVELATION TO THE BLESSED PROPHET WAS INTERRUPTED Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does He hate you. [93:3]

In other words: “O My Beloved, your Exalted and Holy Lord has not abandoned you, is not angry with you, does not hate you. Those are the mistaken ideas of your enemies. I have loved you and created you from all eternity. One who has been so loved can never be hated and cut off. A lover does not countenance separation from the loved one. Do not let the words of the unbelievers make you desperate and dismayed. They are malicious foes of the true religion. My Beloved, your Glorious Lord will expose the falsehood of your enemies and confirm the truth of what you say. He will endow you with many kinds of charismatic powers and reveal to you the Mighty Proof of the Qur’ān. He will make you victorious over those enemies of yours.”

If those unbelievers of Quraysh, those treacherous enemies of Islam, had not said: “Muhammad’s Lord is angry with him and has forsaken him,” these Verses would not have been sent down. Their unbelief provided the occasion for us to be informed of the value and stature of our Prophet in the sight of Allāh.

When the revelation began to come down again after this temporary break, our blessed Master asked Gabriel why it had been postponed. “O Messenger of Allāh,” said Gabriel, “I wait upon the Lord’s command.”

One day, the noble Companions asked our Master why the revelation had been interrupted. “O my Companions,” said our Master, “I suppose it was because you had not cut your fingernails.” By giving this explanation he impressed upon them the importance of personal cleanliness.

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HEAVENLY ASCENSION OF THE BLESSED PROPHET

The Last shall be better for you than the first. [93:4]

In other words: “I have exalted your name in this world. I have granted you My revelation. I have taken you on My Ascension. I have given you great abundance.

I have granted you a community of saints, righteous lovers, learned scholars and loyal captains. Such are the enormous bounties you have attained in this world, but in the Hereafter you will be even more prosperous. For you, the Hereafter is better than this world. The Hereafter is enduring, devoid of trial and tribulation. The bounties of the Hereafter are likewise enduring, immune to the ravages of time and the causes of decay. As for this world, its bounties are transitory and it abounds in trouble, trial and tribulation.”

Here we have the secret of the Ascension. Through the Verses of the Qur’ān, the Exalted One simply informed His Beloved of the divine favor He had bestowed upon him in this world. In the Prophetic Ascension, however, He demonstrated these things to him and let him see with his own eyes that the Hereafter would be better for him than this world; He gave him direct experience of His Paradise, His Beauty and all His divine favors.

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THE PROPHET’S TWO DESIRES

The pure heart of Muhammad had only two desires: first, the approval of his Lord and second that his Community might be delivered from torment, enter Paradise and attain its bounties. He stated quite plainly that he was ready to sacrifice his own dear children, grandchildren, all his family and even himself for the salvation of his Community. That is why the Glorious and Exalted One said to him:

Your Lord shall give you, and you shall be satisfied. [93:5]

This glorious Verse gave our blessed Master the good news that the Lord had accepted his prayers on behalf of his Community.

THE BANNER OF PRAISE

One gracious divine gift to our blessed Master, the Glory of the Universe, is the standard called the Banner of Praise [liwā'al-hamd]. Under this Banner the Community of Muhammad will find shade on the Day of Resurrection and the Messenger, on him be peace, will make intercession for them when they are gathered there. Till then, the Banner of Praise is planted on a mountain called the Mount of Praise, on a boundless plain in Paradise on High. Its handle is white, its shaft is bluish-green and its point is of ruby. The Banner carries three lines of writing:

The first line reads:

bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

"In the name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate ... " The second line reads:

lā ilāha illā-llāhu muhammadun rasūlu-llāh

"There is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh."

The third line reads:

al-hamdu li-llāhi rabbi l°ālamīn

"All praise belongs to Allāh, Lord of all the worlds."

If anyone repeats these noble formulas, it is a sign that he will be resurrected beneath the Banner of Praise and will enjoy felicity and bliss on the Day of Resurrection.

Beneath the Banner of Praise there are seventy other standards, beneath which seventy thousand mighty angels will form ranks, proclaiming the divine dominion. They will sanctify and glorify Allāh, the Lord of Majesty, as they display the Omnipotence of the Absolute Creator.

When the Banner of Praise has been put at the command of the Messenger, on him be peace, more angels in their thousands will carry it aloft as they escort him to the Place of Resurrection. As they make their procession toward Paradise, all the great Prophets and noble Messengers will congregate beneath the Banner, along with all those who have affirmed the Divine Unity.

THE PRAISEWORTHY STATION

The place where our blessed Master will intercede for his suffering Community on the Day of Resurrection is called the Praiseworthy Station [al-maqām al-mahmūd]. The Praiseworthy Station is a lofty and splendid dais, prepared for the blessed Messenger by his Exalted Lord. It will be set up in the shade of the Throne, in the midst of the daises granted to the other Prophets. Here the Glory of the Universe will plead with the Exalted Lord, as intercessor for the sinful and disobedient members of his Community; in response to these supplications he will be granted leave to intercede.

According to some traditional accounts, when the Praiseworthy Station has been established beneath the Exalted Throne and our Master has prostrated himself in worship thereon, the Glory of the Messengers will go to the aid of his sinful Community and will heal their incurable ills. By his intercession he will rescue them from the fire of Hell. He will implore his Lord to bestow His Mercy upon them and will insure their admission to Paradise by divine leave.

Many authoritative texts support the belief that this place of intercession is the Praiseworthy Station, including this glorious Verse of the Qur’ān:

Perform the prayer at the sinking of the sun till the darkening of the night, and the dawn recitation; surely the dawn recitation is witnessed. And part of the night: keep vigil in it, as an extra worship for you; maybe your Lord will raise you to a Praiseworthy Station. [17:78-79]

THE FOUR STATIONS OF THE BLESSED PROPHET

The venerable Anas ibn Mālik said: “I heard from Ahmad ibn Fadl that our Master, the noble Messenger of the Lord of all the worlds and the Intercessor for sinners, has four Stations, from each of which he will make supplication to the Lord on behalf of his Community and will plead with Him for its disobedient sinners. The Lord of Majesty has promised His beloved Messenger that He will bestow divine pardon upon the sinful and disobedient Community of Muhammad.”

One of these Stations is the Station of Witnessing [al-maqām al-mashhūd]. This is the Station where, on the night of his Ascension, at the Two Bow Lengths, our blessed Master begged mercy and pardon for his wayward Community from the Most Merciful of the merciful, the Lord of Sovereignty and Dominion, who said to His Beloved: “O My Beloved, by night and day, you have longed to behold the Beauty of My Countenance. Now look upon My Beauty.”

At this Station, where He allowed His Beloved to behold His perfect Beauty, in the intimacy of this transcendent realm, the Lord conferred many other favors upon His Messenger, addressing him wordlessly, from no point in space, but in a manner intelligible only to Allāh and His Messenger.

When He promised to grant a thousand remedies for a single pain, a thousand cures for a single ill, saying:

“I shall be Generous to you till you are content,” the blessed Messenger responded with the plea: “My Lord, my Community is weak; my Community is poor; give me my Community.”

“O My Beloved,” came the divine good tidings, “I shall grant them My Paradise and My Beauty. Do not sorrow, be not sad: I have given you your Community. You are My loved one. I have accepted all your requests, which are less weighty to Me than a handful of dust. I have given you your Community and spared them for your sake. When set against My Mercy and Compassion, all their offenses and sins are a mere pellet in the beak of a bird. You are the Sultan of both worlds and for you I have created My Paradise. Whatever you wish will be given you.”

At this, our Master, the Lord’s Beloved, cried: “Only my Community ... only my Community.” He sobbed and sighed imploringly as he recited the Verse:

[We beg] Your forgiveness, our Lord; to You is the homecoming. [2:285]

That night, many more divine good tidings concerning the Community of Muhammad passed between the One Unique and Everlasting Lord and His Most Praiseworthy Messenger, who was sent as a Mercy to the eighteen thousand worlds, and who learned from the Self-Subsisting One—without intermediary—of the divine favor He would bestow on his Community:

Tell My servants that I am indeed the All-Forgiving, the All-Compassionate. [15:49]

The second Station is the Station of Divine Communion [maqām munājāti-l'ma°būd]. This is the name given to the Station where our Master, the Glory of the Messengers, begged the Most Merciful of the merciful, night and day throughout his life and especially on holy days and nights, with every prayer and supplication, to pardon his sinful and offending Community.

The third Station is the Station Beyond [al-maqām al-mafqūd]. When our Master, the Imām of the Righteous, had been summoned to union with the Ever- Living and Everlasting Lord, and after his most radiant soul had left his blessed body, it was from this Station that, as he was leaving his earthly life behind, he appealed to his Glorious and Exalted Lord to pardon his Community, crying: "My Community ... my Community!"

The venerable Imām °Alī relates: "Our blessed Master had but a few moments to live when he said to us: 'My last instructions to you are that you obey your Exalted Lord, that you fear Him, that you perform your ritual prayers and that you fulfill your duty to those under your control.' After giving these final instructions and advice he cried: 'The Comrade on High ... the Comrade on High!' Then his triumphant spirit departed. However, his blessed lips were still stirring, so softly that only by holding my ear close to them could I hear the Messenger, on him be peace, uttering these words: 'My Community ... my Community ... my Community. . "

The fourth Station is the Praiseworthy Station. As we have already explained, this Station will be established at the Place of Resurrection and from it the blessed Messenger will implore the Everlasting Lord to pardon and forgive his Community.

Said °Ā'isha the Veracious, Mother of the Believers, beloved wife of the noble messenger and pure and precious daughter of the venerable Abū Bakr: "The most excellent of men, Allāh bless him and give him peace, was in my apartment. We lay down together and slept. When I awoke, our Master was no longer at my side. I looked around and saw him praying in a corner of the room. He was prolonging the upright and bowing sections of his ritual prayer as he called upon his Lord with the words: 'O my God—my Community! O my God—my Community!' On raising his head from the bowing position, he would again plead: 'O my God—my Community! O my God—my Community!' Indeed he was repeating this same supplication constantly at every stage of his prayer: 'O my God—my Community! O my God—my Community!' When he had given the final salutation and completed his prayer, I said: 'My mother and father be your ransom, O Messenger of Allāh; what is this community for which you have been begging your Lord and pleading "my Community ... my Community"? You have become disturbed over them and lost your composure. Who are they, this fortunate community?'

" 'O °Ā'isha, he replied, 'This Community is my Community. Are you surprised that I should lose my sleep and my rest begging that they be given to me? Not just tonight, but as long as I live, I shall say: "My Community ... my Community." Indeed I shall go on saying: "My Community ... my Community," not only while I am alive and well but when I depart this life, in my tomb, when the Trumpet is blown, when I arise from my grave and at the Place of Resurrection. At the Balance and on the Bridge I shall be pleading: "O Lord, save my Community ... save my Community." Only if I am together with my Community will my heart achieve happiness.' "

The Venerable Abū Bakr Dreams of the Praiseworthy Station and the Blessed Prophet's Intercession at the Resurrection

The venerable °Umar ibn al-Khattāb said: " I was passing in front of the house of the venerable °Abū Bakr, one day during his Caliphate, when I happened to hear him weeping. His sobbing was so loud that it could be heard from the street. My curiosity was aroused, so I knocked at his door and told his wife I wished to meet the Supremely Veracious one. As soon as I had been admitted to his presence, I asked the reason for his tears.

"O °Umar, he said, 'summon the Companions here.' I obeyed his command and assembled the Companions at this house, where the venerable °Abū Bakr addressed them as follows:

"O Companions of the Messenger of Allāh, O loyal Helpers, as you well know, I was the friend of the blessed Messenger during his earthly life. Our friendship went back to the time of ignorance, before the Messenger called us to Islam. Our Mother, the venerable Khadīja, was the first among the women to accept Islam, Imām °Alī was the first of the children, Zayd was first among the slaves and I was the first adult freeman. Complying with the divine command, I migrated with the blessed Messenger from Mecca the Ennobled to Medina the Illumined. I had the honor and good fortune to travel with him and to enjoy his companionship in the Cave. It was because I was stricken with fear and anxiety lest harm be done to our blessed Master and lest injury befall his noble person, that Allāh, Exalted is He, said to me through the medium of His Beloved: "Do not fear, be not sad. I am with you." He comforted us. My grief and fear were dispelled by these divine good tidings:

“ ‘Even if you do not help the Messenger, Allāh helped him when the unbelievers drove him out, with only one companion. When the two of them were in the cave, he said to his companion: “Be not dismayed, Allāh is surely with us.” Then Allāh sent down His reassuring peace upon him, and supported him with troops invisible to you, and brought low the word of those who disbelieve, for the word of Allāh is supreme. Allāh is Almighty, All-Wise.’ [9:40].

“ ‘At the command of his Exalted Lord , the blessed Messenger took my daughter “Ā’isha in marriage. The hypocrites slandered her and impugned the honor of the Messenger, but they were refuted when a Verse of the Qur’ān came down to confirm my daughter’s veracity. The blessed Messenger returned to her side and treated her with all the kindness due to a wife: a clear indication that she was innocent of infidelity.

“ ‘I had the honor of serving as the Messenger’s minister during his lifetime. Eighteen times during his lifetime I led the prayers at his own prayer-niche. When he passed on to the World of Beauty, I was destined by Allāh to become his Caliph. Our childhood and youth were spent together with the Messenger, on him be peace. I would miss him terribly if I did not see him for half an hour. Some two months having passed since he went to the World of Beauty, I was burnt to ashes by longing and yearning for him. Last night I prayed to the Fulfiller of Needs, begging Him to let me see the blessed Messenger in my dreams. I wept as I made my humble entreaty. Then I dozed off, and what should I see? In the world of dreams, they had taken me to the Place of Resurrection. The Resurrection had begun and all the people were gathered at that unbearably terrifying assembly point. The sun had come down to a height of only a few miles, bringing East and West together. Hell encircled the people, who were heaped on one another like ants. Everyone carried his sins on his back. No one could think. All were in a state of confusion and bewilderment. I had begun to weep at the horror of the sight, when someone appeared at my side. “What is all this about?” I

asked him. “Don’t you see?” said the stranger: “This is the Place of Resurrection.”

“ ‘When I went on to ask: “Who are those bewildered people, standing in rows, with loads on their backs, wondering what to do?” he said: “They are disobedient and sinful members of the Community of Muhammad, waiting for their accounts to be examined.” I then asked if that was the entire area of the Place of Resurrection and he said: “There is another station. Come, let me take you to the place where the Prophets are waiting together.” When he reached a certain spot, I saw that it was a place as wide as the space between heaven and earth, completely flat. The brilliant whiteness of it dazzled my eyes. On every side, innumerable daises had been erected, with countless other radiant platforms further back. In the very middle stood a dais that towered above all the rest. From it there spread a radiance like that of the sun. One glimpse was enough to dazzle the eye of the beholder and the beauty of it was amazing. My unknown companion told me that those seated on the first daises were the Prophets of Allāh, while those sitting on the others were the Saints of Allāh.

“ ‘The Prophets and Saints were holding up their hands as if in supplication, turning their heads toward the Exalted Throne. But the lofty and splendid dais in the center was unoccupied. I asked my guide: “What are they looking at, these Prophets and Saints with upturned hands and heads? What is the name of the empty dais in the middle, and to whom does it belong?”—“That,” he replied, “is the Praiseworthy Station of which we read in the Qur’ān, the Mighty Proof. It belongs to the venerable Beloved of the Almighty. The Prince of both worlds will mount this dais and delight his disobedient Community by interceding for their pardon.”

“ ‘My curiosity was really aroused, so I proceeded to ask: “ Since this dais belongs to Allāh’s blessed Messenger, why is he not there; why does it

stand empty when the other Prophets are all seated on their daises and making supplication?" My companion explained: "The All-Glorious One has given His dearly Beloved permission to intercede from this dais on behalf of all who—from the time of the venerable Adam till the Resurrection—have affirmed the Unity of God and attributed no partners to Him. But even though the Creator of the Universe had promised to pardon and forgive those for whom His Beloved should make intercession, the Glorious Messenger was not content to offer that intercession at this Station and had gone to repeat his supplications at the Supreme Throne. There, he will beg mercy for his disobedient and sinful Community, humbly appealing to the compassion of the All-Glorious that they may be granted divine pardon. That is why his dais stands empty. This station belongs to the Lord's Beloved, who is a Mercy to all mankind."

" 'Feeling more cheerful, I asked what the Prophets and Saints might be praying for. I was told: "Since the Prophets and Saints of Allāh are themselves incapable of interceding for anyone else, they are beseeching the Glory of the Messengers to intercede for them and their communities." No longer able to contain my impatience, I pleaded: "Can you take me to the Mercy to All Mankind?" This was the answer I received: "There can be nothing more beautiful than leading a lover to his beloved. Close your eyes." I obeyed and when I reopened my eyes it was to find myself in front of the Supreme Throne, which shone with a radiance like that of the sun. Before it stood a dais adorned with red rubies below and green emeralds above. Upon that splendid dais the Prince of Both Worlds was prostrate in worship, weeping as he pleaded: "My Community, my Community!" I could not contain the joy and happiness I felt at meeting him, but fear and awe rendered me speechless. He was praying: "My Lord, grant me my Community. Have mercy on them. Let my Community be worthy of Your pardon and forgiveness."

"Suddenly, a voice came from the unseen: "My Beloved, you are saying your Community is weak and helpless, not that it is disobedient, offending

and sinful.” The Lord’s Beloved and Intercessor of Judgment Day continued his communion, saying: “My God, You are All-Knowing and Wise. Indeed they are disobedient, offending and sinful, but they are not polytheists: they affirm Your Divine Unity. They acknowledge Your Oneness and declare it as they extol You with every breath. They do not ascribe partners to You.”

“ ‘I could not endure the tears of our Master, the Almighty’s Beloved, so I cried: “O Messenger of Allāh, I came to behold your beautiful countenance. How you suffer on account of your Community and how you agonize on their behalf! Allāh, Exalted is He, has granted me this union with your beauty. I beg you not to turn your blessed countenance away from me.”

“Raising his blessed head from prostration, he looked kindly at me and said in a voice filled with sadness: “O Veracious one, how should I fail to grieve and be distressed? I can know neither tranquility of heart nor peace of mind until the Lord has pardoned my Community and given them to me. Once my Community has been graced with divine pardon, then will my sorrow depart and then will my heart rejoice. My duty is to beg the Lord for my Community at all times.” I then said: “My mother and father be your ransom, O Messenger of Allāh! Has the Exalted One now made you glad by granting you your whole Community?” He replied: “Praise be to Allāh! Yes, He has granted my wish.”

“ ‘I awoke as soon as I had heard this good news. After I had awoken, the same glad tidings were repeated three times and I heard these words: “All of them ... Entire ... Entire ... ”

“Well, noble Companions, now you know the reason for my weeping. My tears were caused by the joy and happiness I felt on receiving these good

tidings. I asked you to do me the honor of coming here so that I might tell you my dream and convey this happy news to you all.’”

The blessed Prophet said: “I shall intercede for my Community until He calls to me, saying: ‘Are you content, Muhammad?’ and I say: ‘O my Lord, I am content!’ ”

It is abundantly clear from this noble Tradition that the Exalted Lord will permit His Beloved to intercede to his heart’s content on behalf of his Community. Our Master, the Lord’s Beloved and Intercessor of Judgment Day, will intercede for those whose hearts contain just one atom of faith, and he will deliver them from the Fire of Hell.

O Lord, do not set us apart from Your Beloved!

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Amen, in honor of the Chief of the Messengers, and in honor of the company of Saints and Messenger and all their families; and praise be to Allāh, Lord of All the Worlds ...

NOTES

[1]The three questions proposed by the Jewish scholars concerned the following: 1) The story of Dhū-l Qarnayn, 2) The story of the Companions

of the Cave, 3) The secret of the spirit and its nature.

While lengthy responses to the first two questions were revealed to our Master in the Qur’ān [Sūrat al-Kahf], his reply to the third was confined by divine decree to the Verse:

They will ask you about the Spirit. Say: “The Spirit is at my Lord’s command; you have been granted only a little knowledge.’ [17:85]

Although these responses corresponded exactly to what the scholars had prescribed, envy and stubbornness prevented both them and the unbelievers of Quraysh from coming to faith with a few notable exceptions like the learned Jews °Abdullāh ibn Salām and Ka°b al-Ahbār, may Allāh be pleased with them both.

[2]Forty days according to another traditional account.

[3]A special ritual prayer at this time of day [salatu-lduhā] is meritorious though not compulsory.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH DISCOURSE

Mysteries of the Night of Power

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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We revealed it on the Night of Power. / How can you know what is the Night of Power? / The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. / In it the angels and the Spirit come down by their Lord's permission, on every errand. / Peace it is, till break of dawn. [97:1-5].

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INTERPRETATION OF SŪRAT AL-QADR

Thus does the Holy Qur'ān declare that on the blessed Night of Power, Allāh—the One God Omnipotent—sent down His glorious Speech, which He would then reveal over the course of twenty-three years to His refined and beautiful Be loved, through the medium of the trustworthy divine Ambassador. That divine Speech is the Holy Qur'ān, inspired by the Exalted Lord, transmitted in purity by the angel Gabriel, and propagated by our blessed Master, the Most Noble Messenger.

"We revealed it on the Night of Power." In other words: "We sent down the Holy Qur'ān, on the Night of Power from the Preserved Tablet to the Lowest Heaven and to the Abode of Glory."

The Preserved Tablet is on the right-hand side of the Exalted Throne; by the wondrous Power of the All-Glorious Lord, it has been created from white pearl and red ruby. Three hundred times a day the Lord of Glory casts His all-powerful gaze on the Preserved Tablet, bringing some of His creatures to life and causing others to die, abasing some and ennobling others.

And Allāh does whatever He wills ... [14:27]

It is related that the Preserved Tablet of the Exalted Lord contains one hundred and fifteen dispensations of Sacred Law from the time of the blessed Adam down to the Noble Messenger. Allāh, the Lord of Glory, says: “If any believer comes to Me by way of any one of these one hundred and fifteen dispensations, I shall put that servant of Mine in My Paradise.”

The height of the Preserved Tablet is equal to the distance between heaven and earth, while its width is as that between East and West. The Pen which writes upon the Preserved Tablet is made of light. The Preserved Tablet bears this inscription:

There is no god but Allāh Alone; His religion is Islam and Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger, so those who have faith in Him and believe His promise, and follow His Messenger, will be admitted to His Paradise.

INTEGRITY OF THE QUR’ĀN DIVINELY GUARANTEED

fī lawhin mahfūz

On a Guarded Tablet. [85:22]

In other words, it is established on a divine Tablet that the Holy Qur’ān is preserved and immune from substitution, distortion, alteration, the mischief of Satan and the wiles of human devils. The Mighty Proof of the Qur’ān, which invites the unbelievers and hypocrites to the Truth, has been fixed by the Power of God upon the Tablet-of-the Heart-of-Muhammad and on the tablets in the hearts of those who have intimate knowledge of Allāh. Thus it is preserved against the falsifications of the unbelievers and immune from alteration by the mischief makers. Allāh, Great and Glorious is He, takes upon Himself the preservation of the Wise Qur’ān:

“It is We who have sent down the Remembrance, and We are surely guarding it.” [15:9]

The preservation of earlier scriptures had been entrusted to priests, who had introduced certain distortions and falsifications into the sacred texts. That is why Allāh, the Lord of Glory, has made Himself responsible for the preservation of the Holy Qur’ān, so that this Clear Book will remain young and fresh till the Day of Resurrection. Just as it has routed and scattered all its foes throughout fourteen centuries, it will either win over or defeat all those who challenge it till the end of time. Everywhere and always, it will prevail against those who lack the capacity and aptitude to be convinced by it.

The Holy Qur’ān was transmitted from the House of Glory [bayt al-°izza] to our Master, the Lord’s Beloved and Intercessor of Judgment Day, Verse by Verse over a period of twenty-three years, sometimes directly and sometimes through the medium of Gabriel, on him be peace.

According to a noble Tradition:[1] “While the angel Gabriel was teaching our blessed Master the Holy Qur’ān, the divine command issued forth:

Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it along.

We are responsible for how it is put together and recited. [75:l6-17].

In order to make sure of memorizing the Verses as they were revealed to him, our Master, the Glorious Messenger, had been vigorously exerting his blessed lips and tongue. It was in this context that this glorious Verse was sent down by Allāh, the Lord of Glory, with the message: “O My refined Beloved, do not exhaust yourself in your anxiety to make sure of memorizing the Qur’ān ! Do not worry. Don’t be in a hurry with your tongue. We shall most certainly collect the Qur’ān in your blessed heart. Your Lord, who reveals the Qur’ān and sends it down to you, guarantees that He will make you recite it and memorize it.”

The venerable Ibn °Abbās moved his lips as he quoted this same noble Verse, saying: “This is how the blessed Messenger of Allāh used to exaggerate the movement of his lips and tongue.”

After this divine command, whenever Gabriel came to bring him a new revelation, our blessed Master would listen carefully, in silence, and repeat what he had heard after the Angel had gone.

HOW THE FIRST REVELATION WAS DELIVERED

Our venerable Master, the Glory of the Universe, said: “This is how Gabriel started bringing me the revelation. I was worshipping my Lord in a cave on Mount Hirā’ when Gabriel came to me and said: ‘Read!’ I said: ‘I cannot read. ’ He then took hold of me, grasped me and squeezed me almost beyond endurance, before letting go and repeating: ‘Read!’ Again I replied: ‘I cannot read.’ Again he squeezed me to breaking point, then let go and said: ‘Read!’ When I responded yet again with: ‘I cannot read,’ he squeezed me a third time and revealed by inspiration the noble Verse:

iqra’ bismi rabbika-lladhī khalaqa

Recite: In the Name of your Lord who created ...[96:1]

After he had received the revelation of this first glorious Verse of the Qur’ān, our blessed Master went home, trembling with fright, to the venerable Khadīja the Great.

“Wrap me up and cover me, wrap me up and cover me,” he told her. She wrapped and covered his blessed body until his trembling ceased. After a while, he told our Mother, the venerable Khadīja, what had happened to him and said: “I was afraid for myself.”

Khadīja consoled him. “Don’t talk like that,” she said. “I swear by Allāh that your Lord will never make you sad and dismayed, for you are a good man. You look after your kinsfolk; you help those who cannot take care of themselves and bear their burdens for them; you give to the poor, bring happiness to the destitute and find work for the unemployed. You show

respect for the traveler and help people when mishaps befall them in the cause of Truth."

After our Mother, the Venerable Lady Khadīja, had soothed the blessed Messenger of Allāh with these comforting words, she sent for her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal. This person had become a Christian during the time of Ignorance. He knew Hebrew, read the scriptures and had become aware of certain divine mysteries from the Gospel. He was now at a very advanced age and had lost the use of his eyes. Pointing to the Noble Messenger, Khadīja said to Waraqa: "Look, cousin. Hear what your brother has to tell."

Waraqa listened attentively as our blessed Master told him all that had happened. Then he said: "The being you saw is Gabriel, the angel sent by Allāh to Moses, on him be peace. That Most Great Spirit is the possessor of the secret of divine revelation. Oh, if only I could live on into the days of your religious Mission! If only I could survive till the time when the people cast you out, I would join you in exile."

Hearing these words from Waraqa, the blessed Messenger of Allāh said: "Will they drive me away?" Waraqa replied: "Yes, for a Prophet like you has never communicated divine revelation without encountering opposition and being exposed to hostility. Every Prophet has run up against hostility. If I can live to see the days of your Mission, I shall do my utmost to help you."

Unfortunately, Waraqa died shortly after this. In spite of all his hopes and wishes, he could not survive to see those fortunate and blessed days.

According to the noble Tradition reported by Jābir ibn Abdullāh al-Ansārī, the blessed Messenger of Allāh once spoke about how the revelation began: “One day as I was walking along I heard a sound of thunder in the sky. I looked up and saw Gabriel coming toward me on Mount Hirā’. He was seated on a dais between heaven and earth and appeared so awesome that I was greatly afraid. I went straight home and told them to wrap me up. When they had covered me and wrapped me up, Gabriel came to me and said:

‘You, wrapped in your cloak! / Arise and warn!’ [74:1-3]

The Glorified and Exalted Lord was giving this command to His Beloved: “O My Messenger, wrapped in your cloak, arise and give warning of My torment to those who do not believe in you. Tell them about the Majesty, Glory and Might of your Lord. Purify yourself both outwardly and inwardly, your noble heart as well as your bodily form. From now on you will continue to receive divine revelation. Forbid men to worship idols, make them abandon these evil habits, be constant and steadfast in your Mission.” The revelation did indeed continue without interruption from that time onward, apart from an interval of forty days at most, the purpose of which was to teach the Community a lesson.

According to a tradition reported by the Mother of the Believers the venerable °Ā’isha, the revelation began with a genuine vision. The vision came and went at daybreak and contact with the Angel then began.

According to Hārith ibn Hishām, when the blessed Messenger of Allāh was asked how the revelation came down, he said: “At times it comes with a ringing sound. This is the hardest for me to bear.”

Our Mother, the venerable °Ā'isha said: "After the blessed Messenger of Allāh had received a revelation, his temples would be streaming with sweat even on a bitter cold day."

Our blessed Mother also said: "When revelation came to me, the Angel would descend in human shape, appearing most often in the form of a companion called Dihyat al-Kalbī. At other times he would come in the shape of a stranger."

Several sources confirm the fact that he used to sweat when the revelation came down, even on the coldest day. It is also related by various authorities that his camel would collapse beneath him when revelation descended, unable to bear the weight. When Sūrat al-Ma'ida came down to the blessed Messenger of Allāh at Arafat, the legs of the camel he was riding seemed ready to break.

MYSTERY OF THE BLESSED NIGHT OF POWER

As explained in the glorious Sūrat al-Qadr, with which we began this discourse, it was on the Night of Power that the Mighty Qur'ān, our revered scripture, was first sent down by the Lord of heaven and earth, of all worlds visible and invisible, known and unknown.

Let us contemplate the nobility, value and importance of that blessed Night. Allāh, the Lord of Glory, Himself explains the value of the Night of Power and states that the Lucid Book recording His divine speech was sent down

on that Night. While we know that the Night of Power falls in the Month of Ramadān, an effort must be made to ascertain which night it is, since we mortals are unable to specify the date precisely.

The Glorified and Exalted One says in His Holy Book:

[Fast during] the month of Ramadān, in which the Qur'ān was sent down. [2:185]

The month of Ramadān therefore marks the beginning of the external relationship between mortals and the Lord of All the Worlds. The month of Rajab is devoted to the Affirmation of the Unity of Divine Actions [tawhīd al-af°āl], the month of Sha°bān to the Affirmation of the Unity of the Divine Attributes [tawhīd al-sifāt], and the month of Ramadān to the Affirmation of the Unity of the Divine Essence [tawhīd al-dhāt]. Thus three blessed months follow one another in that order. They contain the two great nights called the Night of Absolution [laylat al-barā'a] and the Night of Power [laylat al-qadr], The Night of Absolution is known to fall on the fifteenth of Sha°bān the revered, while it is left to us to discover which precise night of Ramadān is the Night of Power. As with the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān, it was in the honored month of Ramadān that the Scrolls were given to Abraham, the Torah to Moses the Psalms to David and the Gospel to Jesus, on all of them be peace.

To maintain His link with His servants, the All-Glorious Lord has kept the Night of Power a secret. Not knowing exactly when this blessed Night occurs, we are obliged to worship His Essence of Divinity throughout the entire month of Ramadān Thus He has indicated or even announced the divine grace residing in the Night of Power. We are given to understand that a single act of worship devoted to His Essence of Divinity on the Night of

Power is dearer to Him than eighty years or more of service. What remarkable guidance we have in this sublime wisdom, what a great incentive to search out this Night which has been hidden from us as a divine favor!

How can you know what is the Night of Power? [97:2]

“O My Beloved, My physician for the suffering! What will teach you the noble worth, the perfection and virtue of the Night of Power? Who but I can teach you what bounty of Mine, what merciful grace and generosity, resides in that Night? Surely no one can know but I. I alone have knowledge of the favors I shall bestow that Night by devoting all the nights of Ramadān to vigil and worship. Enjoy My divine prizes. On that blessed Night, when My mercy overflows and My greatest blessing on My Muhammad and those fortunate enough to belong to his Community, on that special Night in Ramadān, the month of forgiveness, you must not waste your time in heedlessness, idleness, indolence and sleep. For one act of worship devoted to Me on the Night of Power is better than a thousand months of service. This is a unique opportunity, not given to previous communities. Only by good works over eighty years or more could obtain the reward you can acquire on that one Night by a small act of charity done for My sake, a ritual prayer of two cycles, a good deed such as feeding a beggar, or a kindness like soothing the tears of an orphan.

“As one of My countless merciful favors on that Night, My divine salutation is communicated by Gabriel to believers who keep vigil. Until the dawn, the angels and the Spirit convey divine peace to those believers who spend that blessed Night in worship and prayer.

Although the Night of Power is a secret, our beloved Prophet, who is a Mercy to all Mankind, felt such infinite tenderness and compassion for his Community that he said: “O my Community, look for the Night of Power in the last third of Ramadān, i.e., among the odd nights of the last ten.”

These odd nights are the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th, and 29th of the month. If we cannot devote every night of Ramadān to worship, we should at least display ardor and zeal on these particular nights, so that we may have access to the divine Treasury.

If we wish to attain eternal happiness and salvation, we should not confine our endeavor to serve and worship solely to the month of Ramadān and the Night of Power; we should go willingly to the Court of the Almighty, girding ourselves for His service.

As for the people of Allāh, they treat every night of the year as the Night of Power, drawing aside and saying: “We have no business with the common herd.” If you also suppose every night of your life to be the Night of Power, if you seek the approval of Allāh in all you do each day, you will gain the world of perpetuity and win everlasting bliss and salvation.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE MANIFEST IN GRADUAL REVELATION

As we have explained, it was on the blessed Night of Power that the Holy Qur’ān descended from the Preserved Tablet to the Lowest Heaven and to the House of Glory.

The actual location of the blessed House of Glory is known only to Allāh, to Gabriel, and to those fortunate individuals to whom this knowledge has been granted by God. This blessed spot in the Lowest Heaven is unknown to ordinary mortals. Having been sent down in its entirety to that House of Glory, the Qur'ān was then transmitted by Gabriel to the blessed Prophet. This transmission occurred Verse by Verse as need arose over the course of twenty-three years.

In the gradualness of the revelation we can discern the working of divine providence. Our Master's exalted stature in the sight of God, was progressively demonstrated to those who had been unaware of his noble dignity and worth. As God's Beloved continued to receive the divine revelation until he passed into the World of Beauty, the intimate and loving relationship between him and his Lord was made apparent to the noble angels and to all creatures. Only when the Holy Qur'ān had been completely transmitted did our Master, the Glory of the Universe, depart from this world and attain the World of Beauty.

The gradual revelation of he Holy Qur'ān also serves to indicate that merit lies in reading a few Verses at a time, as well as in reciting the entire Book.

The Venerable °Ā'isha Learns How She Can Recite the Entire Qur'ān Before Going to Bed

One blessed night, our Master got up to pray, saying to the venerable °Ā'isha: "O °Ā'isha, do not lie down to sleep before completing a recitation of the Qur'ān." The Mother of the Believers waited for our blessed Master to finish his prayers before asking him: "O Messenger of Allāh, how could I recite the entire Qur'ān in one night and then go to bed?"

Our Master replied: “O °Ā’isha, the All-Glorious One will grant you the reward for a complete recitation if you recite Sūrat al-Ikhlās three times, Sūrat al-Falaq once, Sūrat al-Nās once, Sūrat al-Fātiha once, and the first five Verses of Sūrat al-Baqara.”

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SPECIAL BLESSINGS ATTENDING THE NIGHT OF POWER

As the Holy Qur’ān was descending from the Preserved Tablet to the House of Glory in the Lowest Heaven, a great clamor broke out among the angels, who all began weeping and wailing. The reason for this commotion was that, to the angels, the revelation of the Holy Qur’ān and the coming of the glorious Messenger were signs of the approaching Resurrection.

The Glorious and Exalted One said: “No one but I can know the gracious bounty of this Night on which the Holy Qur’ān descended. None of My creatures can understand the spiritual power of this Night. Such knowledge and understanding are above and beyond the capacity of the human mind.”

As part of this divine bounty, people of faith who die on this Night are exempt from interrogation. In honor of this Night, a sinful Muslim will be spared the torment of the tomb which he deserves. In honor of this Night, when divine mercy and generosity overflow, those who die then receive divine pardon and are no longer subject to interrogation in the tomb. For this night is the Night of Power. Great is its worth in the sight of Allāh.

Blessed are those conceived upon this Night. On this Night, a light is distributed among the believers, a light which increases even as it is shared around. That light touches the children of unbelievers then conceived, who will be blessed with Islam and die in faith in honor of this Night.

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I repeat: regard every night of your life as the Night of Power. Pray and hope for the mercy of Allāh, for He is generous to His servants. On the Night of Power, His generosity increases, His bounty multiplies, His mercy boils and overflows.

According to the venerable Ibn °Abbās, our blessed Master said: “Allāh will graciously pardon and forgive the parents—who have died in faith—of anyone who performs a prayer with a recitation of Sūrat al-Fātiha and seven repetitions of Sūrat al-Ikhlās and then saying seventy times (after the final salutation and before speaking of worldly matters):

astaghfiru-llāha wa-atūbu ilayh

‘I seek forgiveness of Allāh and I repent to Him.’ ”

If that person’s mother and father were sinners and are suffering torment, they will be blessed with divine pardon and favor. If they are not in torment, they will be raised to a higher degree.

For one who performs this prayer the Most Merciful of the merciful will have pavilions built in Paradise and will cause streams to flow. He will have trees planted in the orchards surrounding those pavilions. He will prepare bounties such as no mortal ever saw, heard of, or imagined. One who performs this prayer will not leave the world for the Hereafter before having seen already the place he will go to in Paradise. Anyone who observes the five daily prayers will have performed this prayer at some time, for the Night of Power is hidden among the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. If you perform the five daily prayers regularly, you cannot miss the Night of Power.

Moses Learns About the Night of Power

The venerable Moses prayed to his Lord on Mount Sinai, saying: " O my Lord, You are close to me. Let me be close to You." He heard the voice of the Almighty reply: "O My Converser, I bring near to me those who keep vigil and worship me on the Night of Power." Moses continued: "O my Lord, I wish to be worthy of Your divine mercy." The Glorious and Exalted One said: "O Moses, those who treat the poor with compassion on the Night of Power are worthy of My mercy." Moses, then made yet another supplication: "O my Lord, I wish to cross safely over the Bridge." The Exalted Lord replied: "O Moses, anyone who gives alms and spends in charity on the Night of Power will cross that dark and dreadful Bridge in safety and at lightning speed."

The Bridge called Sirāt stretches in darkness between Paradise and Hell. The greater a person's light of faith, the easier it will be for him to cross that bridge. We must not forget that the life of this world is also such a bridge and the way of Islam is its safe crossing. For those who have faith, do good works, are content with Allāh and earn His approval, it will be a quick and

easy matter to cross Sirāt, just as they cross the bridge of this world in safety and without mishap.

To return to the venerable Moses, who was praying to the Lord on Mount Sinai: “O my Lord,” he pleaded, “I wish to enter Your Paradise and enjoy its bliss, to shelter in the shade of its heavenly trees and to eat its abundant fruits.” The Almighty reply came: “O Moses, those who glorify Me on the Night of Power will enjoy these bounties in My Paradise.”

The venerable Moses continued: “ O my Lord, I beg for salvation from Your Fire.” “O My Converser, those who seek forgiveness on the Night of Power will find salvation from My Fire.”

The venerable Moses then prayed: “O my Lord, I yearn for Your approval. Be pleased with me!” The All-Glorious One replied: “O Moses, My approval will be won by those who perform a prayer of two cycles for My sake on the Night of Power.”

Thus we see that Moses and the other Prophets, on all of them be peace, were made aware of the great benefits that would be conferred on Muslims for even a small act of worship on the Night of Power.

TRUE BELIEVERS ARE HONEST, TRUSTWORTHY AND FAITHFUL TO THEIR PROMISES

A Young Judge Finds Himself Rewarded for Keeping a Vow

In the Ottoman Empire there were special law schools for training the Islamic judiciary. A judge who applied the rules of the sacred law of Islam was called a Qādī. Students who graduated with first- class honors used to be rewarded and encouraged with an appointment to the judicial district of Medina the Illumined, which then lay within the Ottoman domain. There was once a student at the college for Qādīs, who loved our blessed Master with all his heart and soul. He worked very hard at his lessons and in every spare moment he would pray to his Exalted Lord: “O my Lord,” he would beg with tears in his eyes, “open my mind and grant me ardor and zeal. Let me graduate with first-class honors, so that I may become Qādī for the city of Your refined Beloved. O my Lord, make this easy for me, do not grudge me this favor. If you deign to accept this supplication of mine and grant me my wish to be Qādī of that pure township, I promise and vow to give all the money I have in my pocket to the first person who asks me for help in the course of my blessed journey.”

Days and months went by and that student who loved the Messenger of Allāh so ardently did, in fact, graduate at the top of his class. He had attained his desire to be appointed Qādī for Medina the Illumined.

On his way to take up his appointment, the young Qādī stopped in Damascus to perform his prayers. As he was leaving the mosque, a stranger approached him and begged for alms. The Qādī at once dipped his hand in his purse and happened to pick out a valuable gold coin. Just as he was hesitating to give such a large amount in alms, he heard a voice saying in his ear: “Fulfill your promise!”

Yes indeed, had he not vowed that he would give all the money in his pocket to the first beggar he met on the road? Immediately recalling his

promise, he willingly handed the gold coin to the strange beggar.

After a long and tiring journey, he arrived safely in Medina the Illumined and ran straight to the resting place of the blessed Prophet. On entering the Prophetic Mosque he was annoyed to see someone lying in a corner with his legs stretched out. He woke the man with a light tap on the legs and he sat up and stared at the Qādī. The sun had set, so the young judge performed first the sunset prayer and then the last prayer of the day. He was quite exhausted by the time he went to his lodgings to rest.

After praising his Lord and pronouncing benedictions on the blessed Messenger, he fell into the deep and comfortable sleep of one who has reached his goal. While in this sleep, he had a dream in which he was summoned before the blessed Prophet and informed that someone had brought a complaint against him. Our Master, on him be peace, was sitting in the midst of his noble Companions, while the plaintiff said: “O Messenger of Allāh, I have a case against this man for disturbing my peace.”

Our blessed Master then turned to the Qādī and asked him how he pleaded to this charge. Finding himself face to face with the radiant Prince of Both Worlds, whom he had loved so ardently since he was very small, the Qādī swooned as he said: “O Messenger of Allāh, what am I supposed to have done to this person? Pray, bid him tell me the nature of my offense.”

The plaintiff at once replied: “I was lying in the Mosque when this Qādī woke me with a kick and disturbed my peace.” The Qādī apologized and begged to be forgiven. Our Master, the glorious Messenger, called for a reconciliation between the parties, so Qādī and plaintiff embraced each other and made friends.

When the Qādī opened his eyes, he was filled with joy because of the divine grace he had received. The Call to Prayer was sounding from the Prophetic Mosque, so he quickly performed his ablutions and ran to be in time for the morning prayer. What should he see on approaching the resting place of the blessed Prophet? There was that same man with his legs stretched out at the same spot. This time he got down on his knees and kissed the man's feet. The stranger awoke, straightened up and said to the Qādī: "What do you want of me? Yesterday you kicked me and today you are kissing me."

The Qādī apologized, saying: "I beg your pardon and forgiveness." The stranger stared at him again as he said: "You are a peculiar fellow, I do declare. Were we not reconciled in the presence of the blessed Messenger just half an hour ago? Have we not settled our accounts?"

As the Qādī's eyes opened wide in amazement, the man took something from his pocket and held it out toward him saying: "Do you remember this gold coin? You gave it to me outside the mosque in Damascus. Because you were faithful to your promise, I let you see the beautiful countenance of the glorious Prophet."

As the Qādī was staring at the gold coin in the palm of his hand, the unknown stranger disappeared from sight.

THE ANGELS ARE GIVEN THEIR DUTIES ON THE NIGHT OF POWER

The Night of Power is an important turning point, when the angels are assigned their responsibilities for everything that is to happen in the coming year: death, sustenance, love, rain, earthquake, war, poverty, wealth, scarcity and abundance, all decisions and affairs. It is the blessed Night when destinies are duly put into effect in accordance with the divine decree by which they were determined before the creation of heaven and earth. The names of those about to die are given to °Azrā'īl, the Angel of Death; the angels in mothers' wombs are instructed concerning the children to be born; food and plants are assigned to Michael; mercy and torment are the concern of Gabriel; winds and rain are put in the care of Isrāfīl; and all other matters are similarly assigned to the particular angel responsible. That is why this night is called the Night of Power.

COULD THE NIGHT OF POWER FALL OUTSIDE OF RAMADĀN?

It is said that the Night of Power may occur within Ramadān or outside that month. Here are some of the arguments in support of this view:

According to some of the scholars, if a man divorces his wife or emancipates a slave "with effect from the Night of Power," one whole year must elapse before that divorce or emancipation takes effect. This was the opinion arrived at by the venerable Ibn Mas°ūd, after careful study of the sources of Islamic Law.

The Night of Power falls on one of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. While it probably occurs in the last ten days of Ramadān, it may possibly come at the beginning of Ramadān, in the middle of that month or outside of Ramadān altogether. Allāh has kept this night a hidden secret. Try and discover it if you can!

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Sa°īd ibn al-Musayyib, may Allāh be pleased with him, said: “Anyone who performs the sunset and evening prayers, in congregation, from one year’s end to the next, will be sure of catching the Night of Power.”

THE NIGHT WHEN “THE GATE OF HEAVEN IS OPEN”

That Night is pure mercy and salvation. From the setting of the sun till break of day, the angels convey God’s peace to the believers. Those who keep vigil that night, worshipping the Lord in full consciousness of its special value, become as innocent as on the day they were born. The blessed Prophet said: “Those who keep vigil on the Night of Power, in faith and charity, will have all their previous sins forgiven.”

There is no blessing comparable to the sheer divine grace that is the Night of Power ...

The blessed Messenger was breathing his last when a great sadness and despair came over him. He wept inwardly with the realization that he must soon leave his Community behind. “When I have left this world for the Realm of Beauty,” he worried anxiously, “who will convey to my Community the blessings of the All-Glorious and Exalted Lord?” Allāh then cheered his noble heart by sending this splendid Verse to relieve him of sorrow and care: “In it the angels and the Spirit come down ... ” [97:4], In other words: “Do not grieve, My Beloved! I shall send My peace to your

Community on the Night of Power, through the blessed Gabriel and My other angels.”

Our blessed Master said: “On the Night of Power the gate of heaven is open. Every prayer will be accepted and none will be rejected.” The glorious Messenger also said: “On the Night of Power, four great standards are sent down to earth. The first of these is the Banner of Praise, the second the Banner of Mercy, the third the Banner of Forgiveness and the fourth the Banner of Generosity. Seventy thousand angels accompany each standard on its descent from heaven. Each standard bears the inscription:

lā ilāha illā-llāh; Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh

(There is no god but Allāh, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.)”

Anyone who repeats: lā ilāha illā-llāh, Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh three times on that Night will receive a divine favor for each of these affirmations. With the first he will receive pardon and forgiveness, with the second, deliverance from the Fire and with the third, admission to Paradise.

The Banner of Praise will be planted between heaven and earth, the Banner of Forgiveness on the Prophet’s tomb, the Banner of Mercy on the revered Ka°ba and the Banner of Generosity on the Rock in Jerusalem.

On the Night of Power, seventy divine salutations are delivered to the home of every Muslim.

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Our Mother, the venerable °Ā'isha, asked the blessed Prophet: "O Messenger of Allāh, if I become aware that it is the Night of Power, how should I pray? Is there a special supplication for that Night, which I should offer to the Exalted Lord?" The blessed Messenger replied: " O °Ā'isha, if you discover that Night you should offer this prayer: 'O Allāh, You are Pardoning. You love pardon, so pardon me!' "

This advice was clearly intended for all believers ...

BLESSINGS FOR ALL MANKIND

The divine mercy distributed on the Night of Power is not confined to believers only. Even unbelievers may receive a share of this mercy, in which case they will die in faith.

As for us, the Community of Muhammad, let us prostrate ourselves in grateful worship at the thought of the divine favor conferred upon us ... O Lord, let us be among those who discover the Night of Power. Let us be worthy of Your pardon and deserving of Your forgiveness. Let our end and outcome be good. May we say: "Allāh!" in good times and in bad. Let us not be among those heedless ones who call upon You in hardship and distress, only to forget You in times of ease and comfort. Let us call Your name in joy and in sorrow, always and everywhere. May we fear You, love

You and worship You, remembering You in sickness and in health, in poverty and wealth.

In honor of the Chief of the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds. May our supplication be accepted!

NOTES

[1]Recorded by Tirmidhī and reported by Sa°īd b. Jubayr on the authority of the venerable Ibn °Abbās.

THE TWENTY-NINTH DISCOURSE

Affirmation of Divine Unity

Bismi’llāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

Contents

Interpretation of Sūrat al-Ikhlās.

The Four Divine Names it contains.

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Invoking the Divine Names Ahad, Wāhid, Samad.

Sūrat al-Ikhlās constitutes One Third of the Holy Qur'ān.

Stories

A Very Brief Discussion of the Comparative Merits of Silent and Audible Dhikr.

A Man dreams of the Blessings received by his Departed Son.

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The angel Gabriel settles a Man's Debt.

Poverty relieved for a Man who followed Good Advice.

Say: ‘He is Allāh, One! / Allāh, the Everlasting. / He begets not, nor is He begotten, / and there is none like unto Him.’ [112:1-4].

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INTERPRETATION OF SŪRAT AL-IKHLĀS

The fundamental principle of Islam is the Affirmation of Divine Unity [tawhīd]. Because this glorious Sūra expresses this principle with the utmost eloquence, precision and purity, it is called “Unity” [al-tawhīd] or “Basic Principle” [asās], as well as by its usual title: “Sincerity” [ikhlās]. There are those who call it “the Everlasting,”[1] [samad],“Salvation” [najāh] or “True Wisdom” [ma°rifa], in view of its meaning and content. All these blessed names are permissible.

The noble Commentators differ as to whether this Sūra was revealed at Mecca or at Medina. While al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī maintain that it was revealed at Mecca the Ennobled, al-Baydāwī and Abū-l Su°ūd take the other view. According to some, it was revealed during the Hijra, on the road to Medina the Illumined. All are agreed, however, that because of its special virtue, this glorious Sūra is equivalent to one-third of the Holy Qur’ān.

As for the occasion of the revelation of the glorious Sūra “Sincerity” or “Unity,” the following traditional account rests on the authority of Ubayy ibn Ka°b, Jābir ibn °Abdillāh, Abū °Alī al-Washshābī and °Ikrima, may Allāh be pleased with them all:

°Āmir ibn al-Tufayl and Zayd ibn Qays, unbelievers of Quraysh, came with their henchmen and asked our blessed Master, the Messenger of Allāh: “Of the idols we worship as our gods, some are of gold, some of silver, some of copper and some of iron. O Muhammad, describe this Allāh you worship. Which of these metals is your Allāh made of?”

Our blessed Master was on the point of replying: “Allāh, my All-Glorious Lord, resembles nothing whatsoever,” when this splendid Verse came down to sweep away all false and distorted beliefs with its uncompromising affirmation of the Oneness and Eternal Self-Sufficiency of the Lord of All Worlds.

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The perfect believer is one who exempts Allāh, the Exalted One, from all attributes of deficiency and ascribes to Him all attributes of perfection, affirming this with his lips and believing it in his heart. Through intimate knowledge of Allāh, he comes to take conscious pride in his faith and rejoices in the blessings its affirmation brings. For knowledge of Allāh is a light within the heart. To know, remember and find Allāh is to achieve bliss and salvation. Knowledge of Allāh is the greatest wisdom. To know the Oneness of the Truth, that is the genuine Affirmation of Divine Unity. True enlightenment is penetrating to the reality of things and seeing them as they are in their essential nature. The secret of the knowledge of God is revealed to those able to be consciously aware that the Exalted Lord is the First of the first, the Last of the last, the Inner and the Outer, the Omniscient and Omnipotent, Master of all creatures, Absolute Owner of all that exists in the universe, Lord and Sustainer. That secret is revealed to those who come close to the Exalted One by affirming with their lips, and confirming in

their hearts, their belief that He is without partner or equal in His essence and attributes. Those blessed and fortunate individuals acknowledge Him with the divine pronoun HŪ (“He”), which refers solely to Allāh, the Exalted One. They see nothing but Allāh, the All-Glorious.

Indeed, such beings make their divine remembrance by uttering the simple syllable: “HŪ.” This glorious utterance is devoid of ulterior motive or consideration, whereas there is some expectation of return when Allāh is addressed with “O Sustainer” [Yā Razzāq], “O All-Forgiving” [Yā Ghaffār] of “O Veiler of Faults” [Yā Sattār]. Since “HŪ” is a direct appeal to the Essence of Divinity, the expression of a pure and simple longing for the Exalted Lord, this form of remembrance represents an exalted level of dhikr for those who come close to Him.

To experience in dhikr the blissful ecstasy of “HŪ,” is to plunge into the ocean of divine consciousness and spiritual awareness, to purify the heart and to enter the world of divinity while still in this transitory world. Although nominally in this world, those who achieve this annihilate their physical being in the flames of Divine Love, finding bliss in the world of Unity and the “seat of truthfulness” in the Hereafter, where they will remain forever with the Exalted Lord. This is the station of Perpetuity with Allāh [baqā’ billāh].“HŪ” is the remembrance of those who achieve this station. “HŪ” is their contemplation. In their ecstasy they are with “HŪ.” These noble beings are those who see but One in the multiplicity of Unity.

There is a progression from audible dhikr to silent dhikr, from silent dhikr to dhikr of the soul, from dhikr of the soul to dhikr of the inner secret. According to those who have achieved the latter, to go back to audible dhikr is a retrogression. Such things can be verified only by experience. May the Glorious One let us all taste the blissful joy of this “HŪ.”

As for those the Qur’ān calls “Companions of the Right side,” they have not yet reached the station of sainthood and the higher degrees of holiness and therefore see Unity as manifold. Seeing Oneness together with multiplicity, they cannot be content with the simple pronoun “HŪ.” To distinguish the Creator from the created, they combine the pronoun with the noun and remember the Lord as “Allāhu.”

For the benefit of ordinary, unenlightened people, the noble “One” [Ahad] is added to the word “Allāh.” The noble Verse: “Say: ‘He is Allāh, One! [qul huwa-llāhu ahad]’” serves to refute the false doctrines of the ignorant, while offering the wine of divine unity to those of us who have tasted the bliss of faith.

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There is also a second tradition concerning the occasion of revelation of Sūrat al-Ikhlās:

The time came when the believers were given permission to migrate to Medina in order to escape the cruel tyranny they were suffering at the hands of the unbelievers in Mecca. Many families moved in secret to Medina the Illumined, so that very few Muslims were left in Mecca. The unbelievers of Quraysh gathered together in council to hatch a plot against our Master, the blessed Messenger of Allāh. They agreed that they would surround the house where the noble Prophet was staying and wait for our blessed Master to fall asleep. Sworn conspirators from every tribe would then rush in and murder the glorious Prophet. By this means they imagined they would extinguish Islam.

Gabriel informed our blessed Master of what was afoot. That night the Chief of the Prophets put our Master the venerable °Alī in the bed where he would have slept. Throwing a handful of dust over the unbelievers of Quraysh, and leaving them all in a state of temporary blindness, our blessed Master slipped through their midst and escaped unnoticed.

We mortals may look, but it is the Exalted Lord who causes us to see. Unless He shows, no one can see anything.

Together with the venerable Abū Bakr, our Master the most noble Messenger hid for a few days in a cave on Mount Thawr. The unbelievers came right up to the mouth of the cave but failed to see the friends of God who were hiding inside. The infidels of Quraysh returned to Mecca empty-handed, frustrated and confused. As soon as they had gone, our blessed Master and his most veracious and loyal Companion of the Cave set out at once for Medina the Illumined.

The accursed Abū Jahl was sending criers around, announcing a reward of a hundred red camels, a hundred slave girls and a hundred Arabian horses for anyone who brought in our blessed Master alive or dead. An infidel named Surāqa took up the challenge. “I shall bring you Muhammad alive or dead,” he cried as he leapt to horse and rode in pursuit of the noble Messenger, whom he overtook on the Medina road. Just as he was drawing his sword to attack our Master, the Glory of the Universe, Gabriel came down and said: “O Messenger of Allāh, the Lord of All the Worlds salutes you and puts the earth at your command.” No sooner had our blessed Master cried: “Earth, swallow him up,” than Surāqa’s horse sank into the ground up to its breast, throwing its rider in front of his intended victim. Surāqa came to his senses

as the earth began to swallow him. “Have mercy O Messenger of Allāh,” he groaned.

Our magnanimous Master countermanded his order to the earth and Surāqa was delivered from his plight. But he was blinded by greed; the desire to own all those camels, slave girls and horses made him forget his humanity. Once again He dared to raise his sword against that noble being who had spared his life only moments before. The glorious Messenger gave a new command and the obedient earth began to swallow up Surāqa. “Have mercy, O Messenger of Allāh,” he begged. “Pardon me, I pray, and I shall not repeat my shameless conduct.”

Our generous Master forgave him a second time, bidding the earth to let him go. This time, Surāqa fell to his knees before the camel ridden by our blessed Master and asked: “Who gives you this generous grace?” The blessed Messenger of Allāh replied: “It is from my Lord.”

In fear and dread Surāqa then asked: “O Messenger of Allāh, your Lord must be mighty, powerful and strong indeed. Pray tell me, is that Allāh you call your Lord made of gold or silver?”

Our Master, the Chief of the Prophets, gave no answer to this question. Just as he was silently shaking his head, the Imām of the Prophets and Support of the Sincere received through Gabriel, on him be peace, the divine revelation of Sūrat al-Ikhlās.

Surāqa was blessed there and then with the honor of faith. He performed great services for Islam. During the wars in Iran he entered the very palace

of Chosroes, snatched the bracelets from the emperor's wrists and put them on his own. He thereby fulfilled a prophecy, for the blessed Messenger of Allāh had congratulated him, predicting: "O Surāqa, I see you wearing the bracelets of the Persian Emperor."

A Prophetic miracle was thus fulfilled and Surāqa was awarded booty far more valuable than the reward he would have won from Abū Jahl for murdering the Lord's Beloved. He rose in this world to the rank of Companion and gained everlasting bliss and salvation in the Hereafter.

If Surāqa had not agreed to commit a crime for the sake of Abū Jahl's reward, could he possibly have obtained these great bounties? He set out to slay the glorious Messenger and ended up with the blessings of faith. Indeed, Allāh is Almighty: He governs and rules His kingdom as He wills. Whomever He will, He guides aright and whomever He will, He allows to go astray. The Sovereignty is His and His is the Dominion. Everything is His. We owe Him worship and service.

According to the venerable Ibn °Abbās, the blessed Messenger of Allāh said: "Before Gabriel brought me this glorious Sūra, I was worried about the fate of my Community and feared they could not escape divine torment. That fear and anxiety left me when this Sūra came down and I was shown its virtue and importance for those who recite it. I was no longer concerned about how my Lord might treat my Community, for the revelation of this Sūra made me realize that they would not suffer torment. This glorious Sūra relates to Allāh Himself, and declares His Oneness and His attributes."

The crown of piety and righteousness descends from heaven upon the heads of those who recite this noble Sūra. Divine tranquility comes down upon them and their hearts achieve pure bliss. Divine mercy enraptures them. The

Exalted One looks with compassion upon His servants who read this Sūra and if He looks upon a servant with compassion, He will grant that servant his every wish.

A note of explanation: When we mention the special virtue of certain Sūras of the Qur'ān and state that a particular reward is obtained by those who read them, what we mean by reading is to acknowledge the truth of what is read and then to act sincerely in putting it into practice.

THE FOUR DIVINE NAMES IN SŪRAT AL-IKHLĀS

The glorious Sūrat al-Ikhlās contains four names. Those who invoke these names will quickly achieve their destined goal:

1. "HŪ." As we have already explained, this is the divine pronoun. It represents the station of the saints, who are the intimates of Allāh. "HŪ" is the invocation by which they remember and glorify Him.

2. "O Allāh!" [Yā Allāh] is the invocation of the Companions of the Right side.

3. "O One" [Yā Ahad].

4. " O Eternally Self-Sufficient" [Yā Samad].

As written in the Arabic script, “Allāh” is a word of four letters:

alif-lām-lām-hā’. The first letter symbolizes this lower world, the second stands for the intermediate realm [al-barzakh] while the third is the symbol of the Hereafter. The final letter is the initial of “HŪ,” the remembrance and glorification of those who desire nothing but the Lord and have no interest in the bounties of this world, the intermediate realm or the delights of the Hereafter.

The blessed Prophet said: “Allāh, the Exalted One, has ninety-nine names; those who count them will enter Paradise.”

THE THREE CLASSES WHO AFFIRM THE DIVINE UNITY

Those who affirm the Divine Unity are in three classes: the commoners, the elite and the elite of the elite.

The commoners of this Community will enter Paradise because they remember the Beautiful Names and repeat them verbally.

As for the elite of the Community, they ponder the meaning of the Beautiful

Names and model their character upon them. They will therefore enter the Paradise of Divine Attributes.

As for the elite of the elite, they unite with the Names as manifestations of Reality and will enter the Paradise of Divine Essence. All this has been foretold. Like the Beautiful Names, the levels of Paradise-on-High are also ninety-nine in number.

As for those who turn away from the mercy and remembrance of God and deny the Truth, we are told: “Allāh will subject the unbeliever to a hundred torments in the hundred depths of Hell.”

O God, deliver us from the Fire and admit us to Paradise with the righteous!

THE “KING” OF THE BEAUTIFUL NAMES

huwa-llāh

“He is Allāh.’

This is the King of the Beautiful Names. It is Allāh’s own noble Name. As the pure Name of Glory and Majesty, it is the consummate integration of all the Beautiful Names.

The noble word “Allāh” signifies the totality of divine perfections as personified in the mysterious Essence of Divinity. It signifies that all specific beings, whether actual or potential, arise from the Ocean of the Power of Oneness and subsist by virtue of His Self-Subsistence.

As for the slave or servant of Allāh, it behooves him to worship the Divinity with inward veneration and outward obedience, with conscious trust, reliance and dedication, with spiritual love and devotion, and without regard for anything but Allāh. In other words, he must see the Power of Allāh in all things and before all things apparent in the universe.

Those who pronounce the invocation “O Allāh [Yā Allāh]” one thousand times every Friday (the day of congregational prayer) will be included in the company of the saints.

If someone says Yā Allāh one hundred times before the congregational prayer on Friday, while in a state of perfect ritual purity (i.e., having performed a complete ablution), he will achieve whatever he desires.

If someone says Yā Allāh one thousand times each day, he will rise to Certainty of Knowledge and his heart will be made whole.

If Yā Allāh is recited to an invalid two hundred times, he will certainly recover health unless his hour has come.

THE MERIT OF PRONOUNCING THE “GOOD SENTENCE”

The Good Sentence La ilāha illā-llāh (“There is none worthy of worship except Allāh”) embraces all the names and attributes of the One truly deserving of worship, for it is the pure affirmation of the Reality of the Essence of Divinity. When made by a human being, this affirmation of Divine Unity signifies: the heartfelt conviction that Allāh, Glorious is His Majesty, is the One who Alone deserves to be worshipped; the soul’s conviction that He is the true Aim and Goal; the innermost conviction that He is the true Beloved; the belief that the Reality of His Divine Essence is devoid of all attributes of deficiency and that He is truly qualified with all attributes of perfection; belief in the perfect unity of actions, attributes and essence, based on the sure and certain knowledge that He is the One Effective Doer, that His attributes are from all eternity and that His existence is Necessary Being.

Heedlessness and forgetfulness will depart from the one who recites the affirmation of Divine Unity one hundred times after every ritual prayer. His heart will be relieved from care.

Great wisdom lies in following the noble utterance La ilāha illā-llāh with: Muhammadun Rasūlu-llāh (Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh). As written in Arabic the combined sentence consists of seven words. Having entered this world, a human being faces seven trials and encounters seven perils:

1. Death. A human being will either depart in faith or die in unbelief (We take refuge with Allāh, Exalted is He!).

2. Our path leads to the grave, which will be either filled with light or plunged in darkness (We take refuge with the Exalted Lord from the darkness of the grave!).

3. In the grave we shall meet the two interrogating angels called Munkar and Nakīr. We shall either give true and honest answers to their questions or else our jaws will be locked.

4. The peril of the Day of Resurrection. On that Day some will have radiant countenances, while others will have their faces soiled. The former are destined for salvation and the latter for the Fire.

5. The Reckoning. Which will weigh heavier in the Balance, our good deeds or the bad?

6. Will the reckoning be made easy for us, or will we find it hard?

7. Does our way lead to Paradise or to Hell?

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BLESSEDNESS OF DIVINE REMEMBRANCE

If we wish to pass safely through those seven terrible perils, we must constantly affirm: La ilāha illā-llāh Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh. Those who persevere in this will gain the following benefits:

They will pass over in faith, without feeling the agony of death.

Their graves will be filled with light and they will find it easy to answer the questions put by the two angels.

Their faces will be radiant on the Day of Resurrection.

At the Reckoning, their accounting will be quick and easy.

At the Balance the right-hand scale containing their good deeds will outweigh the other.

They will cross the Bridge like lightning and find their way to the highest Paradise.

They will be lodged beside Muhammad Mustafā, Allāh bless him and give him peace.

They will be granted the vision of Everlasting Beauty, their supreme goal and most exquisite desire.

This blessed affirmation is also a sure protection against the promptings of

Satan, or as we read in the Holy Qur’ān:

From the mischief of the slinking whisperer ... [114:4]

La ilāha illā-llāh is the basis, foundation, marrow and essence of Islam. This Good Sentence is the quintessence of dhikr. It occurs in thirty-one Verses of the Holy Qur’ān.

When Remembrance of Allāh has begun, Satan can no longer insinuate his evil suggestions. He takes flight from the Remembrance of Allāh, for in the spiritual realm dhikru-llāh is an enormous fire preventing the enemy from entering the heart. Through Remembrance of Allāh the heart is cleansed and purified of all that is foul and unclean. Remembrance of Allāh makes the body smell sweet, strengthens the soul and illumines the eye of the heart. It fills the human heart with the light of the Exalted Lord, and rids it of the temptings of Satan. Remembrance of Allāh is radiance and grace for the body and the heart, guidance and direction for the soul. It is the remedy for every pain. It prevents the disasters of this world and the Hereafter. Satan and human devils alike shy away from those who remember their Lord. Constant Remembrance keeps the heart awake and one whose heart never sleeps is immune to Satan’s mischief. The most excel lent dhikru-llāh is La ilāha illā-llāh. To make Remembrance with heart composed, whether in secret or in public, is to become a king.

There are those who maintain that the best Remembrance is dhikr performed in secret. In fact, all Remembrance of God is most excellent be it done silently or aloud, in private or in public. For the Lord says: “Remember Allāh that you may prosper.”

Our blessed Master, the Messenger of Allāh, said in a noble Tradition: “The most excellent Remembrance is La ilāha illā-llāh.” As for how the Remembrance should be performed, he left it to the taste of the individual concerned. In other words, he gave no command or instruction as to whether dhikru-llāh should be performed secretly or openly. It is sometimes appropriate to do it silently and at other times aloud. Those who insist on one or the other form exclusively are equally at fault.

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Never forget Allāh, Glorious is His Majesty! Remember the Lord wherever you may be! Make your Remembrance, your dhikr, in any form you please and peace be upon you, for it is left to us to interpret the noble Tradition: “The best remembrance is La ilāha illā-llāh.”

A Very Brief Discussion on the Comparative Merits of Silent and Audible Dhikr

One man said to another who was doing dhikr aloud: “We remember the Exalted One in secret. Secret dhikr is more meritorious.”

The first man then rejoined: “Now that you have told me about your secret dhikr, you might as well have done it publicly.” This reply put a stop to the conversation.

Indeed, the whole point is not to be heedless of Allāh, Glorious is His Majesty, but to remember the Exalted Lord.

As the Lord of All Worlds says in the Sacred Tradition: “La ilāha illā-llāh is My fortress; whoever enters My fortress is safe from My torment.”

INVOKING THE DIVINE NAMES MEANING “THE ONE,” “THE UNIQUE,” AND “THE ETERNALLY SELF-SUBSISTING”

The glorious Sūrat al-Ikhlās also contains the noble Name: al-ahad (jalla jalāluhu)

The One (Glorious is His Majesty).

The Reality of the Divine Essence is immune from any kind of partnership. Since Allāh, Magnified and Glorious is He, has existed from all eternity, even before He created the entire universe, He is invoked as:

yā wāhid

O Unique One!

Since He has no need of His creation, and since no partner or peer can ever be ascribed to Him, He is:

al-ahad

The One.

Through this Name, God’s servant comes to affirm the Unity of the Divine Essence. If this Name is mentioned by someone traveling alone, that person will find a good companion. This Name will also keep one company on death’s lonely and fearful journey. In any case, it should be repeated one hundred and thirty times

al-samad

The Eternally Self-Subsisting.

All creatures are beggars at the Court of His Divinity, but Allāh, Glorified and Exalted is He, is independent of all His creatures. He is far Higher and Greater than them all.

Through this Name, we acknowledge that every creature is dependent on the Exalted Lord at every moment of its continuing existence. We turn completely to Allāh, Exalted is He, and place our absolute trust and reliance in Him.

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The venerable °Ā'isha, Mother of the Believers, reported this noble Tradition: "The blessed Messenger said to me one night: 'O °Ā'isha, do not lie down to sleep until you have performed these four blessed acts of worship: First, read the whole of the Holy Qur'ān; Second, win the approval of the noble Prophets, that they may intercede for you on the coming Day of Resurrection; Third, make the believers content and pleased with you; Fourth, complete the lesser Pilgrimage.' He then got up to pray, leaving me no time for questions.

"I sat on my bed, wondering how I could ever possibly perform these four blessed deeds in the course of one night. When our beloved Master had finished praying, I said to him: 'O Messenger of Allāh, you are dearer to me than my own mother and father. You told me not to lie down and sleep without having completed four things. How could I possibly accomplish them in so short a time?'

"He smiled and he replied: 'O °Ā'isha, recite the noble Sūrat al-Ikhlās three times. The reward will be the same as for reading the entire Qur'ān. If you bless me and the Prophets who came before me, you will enjoy my intercession and theirs on the Day of Resurrection. To make all the believers content, seek pardon and forgiveness for them from the Exalted Lord. As for the lesser Pilgrimage, you will receive its reward if you glorify

God by saying: “Glory and Praise to Allāh; there is none worthy of worship but Allāh; Allāh is Supremely Great.²’ ”

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According to Ubayy ibn Ka°b, the blessed Prophet said: “For anyone who recites Sūrat al-Ikhlās just once, there is a reward like that earned by a hundred martyrs.”

It should not be forgotten that the believer has a thousand idols for every single idol of the unbeliever. By continuous reading of this glorious Sūra, we cleanse our hearts of these idols and become sincere in our actions.

A Man Dreams of the Blessings Received by his Departed Son

A man’s son died. That night, he dreamed that he saw the boy in Hell, chained up and suffering cruel torment. The unhappy father was horrified, but what could he do to save his son? He wept and lamented and awoke in a state of crisis.

The next night, he again saw his son in a dream; but this time he was happy, for the boy was in Paradise and bliss. By divine leave, he asked his son how he had been delivered from Hell and come to this blessed state. This was the answer he received:

“A person worthy to recite al-Ikhlās happened to pass by the cemetery where I lay. He recited the noble Sūra three times and donated the reward to all the dead buried there. The Exalted Lord created such a light in honor of those three recitations of Sūrat al-Ikhlās that all the bounties you see fell to my lot.”

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Saint Junayd Helps a Stranger to Cross the River

Saint Junayd al-Baghdādī once saw a man strolling by the edge of the River Euphrates. He greeted him and asked him why he was strolling there. “I am waiting for a boat to ferry me across to the other shore,” the man replied.

“Come,” said Junayd, “Let me take you across.” When the fellow asked him how he could do that, he said: “By remembering Allāh.” Then he asked: “Take care not to say anything except: As the Sheikh says.’ ”

He took the man by the hand and they started walking on the water together. The venerable Junayd was saying: “Allāh, Allāh,” while the fellow beside him kept repeating the words: “As the Sheikh says, as the Sheikh says.”

They were halfway across and the venerable Junayd still went on with his dhikr: “O Allāh, O Allāh! O All-Powerful, O All-Powerful!” The other man began to wonder why he should confine himself to saying: “As the Sheikh says ... ” He decided to try invoking Allāh, too, but as soon as he said: “O Allāh, O All-Powerful,” he began sinking into the river.

The venerable Junayd pulled him to safety, then chided him: “Do you think yourself competent to mention the names of Allāh? Because I knew your mouth was unfit for that, I told you to say nothing but: ‘As the Sheikh says.’ ” With these words, he brought the man safe and sound to the opposite bank of the river.

SŪRAT AL-IKHLĀS CONSTITUTES ONE THIRD OF THE QUR’ĀN

According to Abū Dardā’: “Sūrat al-Ikhlās constitutes one-third of the Holy Qur’ān. If we read it three times, we obtain the same reward as for reading the Holy Qur’ān from beginning to end. This is a tremendous favor from the Glorious and Exalted Lord, bestowed upon the Community of Muhammad.”

The blessed Prophet said: “Allāh has divided the Qur’ān into three parts, and He has made ‘Say: “He is Allāh, One” ‘ one of the three parts of the Qur’ān.” Imām Nawawī says: “The Holy Qur’ān falls naturally into three sections: Stories; Rules of Sacred Law; Verses dealing with Attributes of Allāh. Since Sūrat al-Ikhlās is the noble statement of the Divine Unity, it sums up the whole of the third section. Those who read it, therefore, receive the reward for the recitation of one third of the Qur’ān.”

The Angel Gabriel Settles a Man’s Debt

Our blessed Master, the Prince of the Universe, was sitting at the gate of the Prophetic Mosque in Medina the Illumined. A funeral party came along and

they asked our Master to perform the funeral prayers for the deceased. The glorious Messenger asked whether the dead man had left any debts. “Yes, O Messenger of Allāh,” said one of the group: “He owed so-and-so four dirhams, and he died without having repaid the money.” The blessed Prophet declined to perform the funeral prayers. “You pray for him,” he said.

Just then, Gabriel came down and said: “O Messenger of Allāh, the All-Glorious Lord salutes His noble Prophet and bids His Beloved to pray for that man. He made me assume human form and had me settle that servant’s debt. Please arise and attend the man’s funeral prayers, for he has been forgiven.”

Our blessed Master asked Gabriel: “What kind of a good deed did that man do, to merit this grace and generous favor?” Gabriel replied: “O Messenger of Allāh, each day he used to recite the noble Sūrat al-Ikhlās one hundred times for the sake of his Maker. Since this glorious Sūra describes the Attributes of Allāh and extols the Noble Lord of All the Worlds, the divine attribute of Generosity was manifested for this servant; in honor of his hundreds of recitations, he was not only forgiven but had his debt settled for him.”

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Great indeed is the merit of this noble Sūra. It is the intercessor of the Hereafter, a companion in the tomb and a friend at the Place of Resurrection. It is the cause of deliverance from Hellfire and the passport to Paradise.

Poverty Relieved for a Man who Followed Good Advice

A man once bemoaned his poverty and hardship in the presence of our blessed Master, the Messenger of Allāh. Our Master said to him: “When you get back home, recite Sūrat al-Ikhlās.”

The man obeyed this Prophetic instruction, with the happy outcome that the Exalted Lord removed his poverty and misery and raised him to high esteem.

If anyone follows that same advice of our Master, the Most Noble Messenger, he will receive dignity and honor from the Exalted One in this world and in the Hereafter. But if anyone turns his face from the Glory of the Universe, the Exalted Lord will turn away from him, humiliating and abasing that servant of His in this world and the Next.

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The venerable Companion, Ubayy, relates that our blessed Master said: “The Qur’ān was revealed to me Verse by Verse, letter by letter. When Sūrat al-Tawba and Sūrat al-Ikhlās came down, seventy thousand rows of angels descended with them.”

O my God! O my God! Praise and thanks belong to You alone. Blessings and peace be on Your Beloved and on the other Prophets and Messengers. Make us pleasing to the family, children, wives, companions, helpers and

friends of Your Beloved ... Grant us the intercession of the Holy Qur’ān, the intercession of al-Ikhlās and the intercession of Muhammad Mustafā ...

In honor of the Chief of the Messengers and in honor of his family, children, companions, helpers and friends; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds.

NOTES

[1]Or “the Everlastingly Independent, on Whom all else depends.”

[2]subbāna-llāhi wa-lhamdu lillāhi wa-lā ilāha illā-llāhu wa-llāhu akbar

THE THIRTIETH DISCOURSE

Forgiveness and Generosity

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Allāh is gracious to His servants, giving sustenance to whom He pleases. He is the Strong, the Almighty. / To him who desires a harvest in the Hereafter, We shall grant an increase in his harvest; and to him who desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him some of it, but in the Hereafter he will have no share. [42:19-20].

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INTERPRETATION OF SŪRAT ASH-SHŪRĀ, vv. 19-20

The reward for deeds done to please Allāh is seen both in this world and the Hereafter. As for deeds that are done only for show, their reward appears in this life, but they have no recompense in the Hereafter. That is why the All-Glorious One says in His Holy Qur'ān: "To him who desires a harvest in the Hereafter, We shall grant an increase in his harvest," then in contrast: "And to him who desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him some of it, but in the Hereafter he will have no share."

Every action is judged according to its intention. The life of this world is transitory and fleeting. Compared to the rewards of the Hereafter, those of this world are therefore a poor substitute of no real value. The reward and recompense of the Hereafter are everlasting. They are great and enduring benefits beyond the hopes and dreams of men.

The Exalted Lord is Kind and Gracious toward His servants. He is Compassionate. His kindnesses and gracious favors to the Community of

Muhammad are so many and so great that the human mind is incapable of grasping their extent. Only through the heavenly scriptures brought by the Messengers are we able to know all these sublime favors and divine bounties. That is why the Messenger of Messengers said in his communion with Allāh: “Glory be to You! We have not thanked You with true thankfulness, O Sole Object of Thanks.”

Our souls express their gratitude through faith, our bodies, by prostrating themselves in worship before the All-Merciful. Through the giving of alms we show gratitude for the wealth we possess. By guarding our honor and virtue, we give thanks for our beauty and strength. Gratitude for faith is shown by praising and extolling the Exalted Lord. Gratitude for being able to praise and extol is expressed as affection and blessings for our Master, the Lord’s Beloved and Intercessor on Judgment Day.

The Most Merciful of the Merciful has told us through His glorious Messenger about one of his favors conferred upon the Community of Muhammad:

On the Day of Resurrection, the record of a man’s deeds, stained with his sins, will be shown to him and then read out aloud. The Glorious and Exalted One will say reproachfully: “Were you not ashamed of committing all these sins against Me?” The sinner will start weeping in fear and shame. Then he will hear the divine Voice calling: “Silence, cease the weeping and wailing. Do not distress my Beloved by letting him hear these moans and groans. If my Beloved gets to know about these sins of yours, you will be in disgrace before him, too. In any case, why are you sobbing and sighing now? In the lower world, I hid all your offenses and did not humiliate you in the eyes of men. Now that you are here, do not make yourself known to my Beloved as a disobedient sinner. Today I have graciously pardoned you.”

At this, the creature will weep even louder from joy and delight. When our Master, the Mercy to all Mankind, hears his wailing, he will bow his blessed head in prostration and beg: “My God, You are the Most Merciful of the merciful, pray forgive this creature for my sake.”

The All-Glorious One will graciously reply: “O My Beloved, do not be sad and dismayed. I have forgiven this servant for your sake.” He will then give that servant to the noble Messenger, delivering him from the Fire and admitting him to Paradise.

THE SOURCE OF ALL COMPASSION

According to the venerable Abū Hurayra, the blessed Prophet said: “Allāh has divided mercy into a hundred parts, keeping ninety-nine of them with Him and sending one part down to earth. This one part is the source of all mutual compassion among creatures, right down to the way an animal avoids trampling its young with its hoof, for fear of harming it.” (In the version recorded by Imām Muslim: “Allāh has kept back ninety-nine parts, from which He will deal mercifully with His servants on the Day of Resurrection.”)

The Lord of Majesty informs His servants of His grace, both in the glorious Verses of the Qur’ān and through the noble Tradition of His blessed Messenger. Every one of us human beings is a servant created by the Creator of the Universe, but the Lord does not address everyone as: “My servant.” Only to those who truly serve him, i.e. to his beloved servants, does he use this form of address. Allāh’s most dearly loved servant is our Master, the Lord’s Beloved, for he is a perfect servant who truly serves his

Lord. That is why our Master is addressed in the Glorious Qur'ān as: "O My slave [yā °abdī]." In the Testimony of Faith his servant-hood is mentioned before his mission: "I testify that there is no god but Allāh, and I testify that Muhammad is His slave and His Messenger." This means that there is no higher station than service to the Exalted Lord. The lowest depth to which one can sink is to become the servant of the wrongful lower self or of tyrants and unbelievers.

The Exalted One makes his servants kings in both worlds. As for those who become slaves to their lower selves, to tyrants and to unbelievers, they face shame, humiliation, disgrace and abasement in this world and the Next.

That is why those who are servants of the Exalted Lord do whatever they do for the sake of pleasing Allāh and in His name. As for those who serve their lower selves, they do everything purely for selfish reasons.

It should not be forgotten that disobedience to the Exalted One, and the commission of a number of sins, do not deprive a servant of his faith. Even his commission of major sins will not turn a believer into an unbeliever, though they will cause him to be humiliated and disgraced in the eyes of other men. Nor is obedient worship an automatic passport to Paradise. Admission to Paradise on High is not by obedience, but by the grace and generous favor of the Glorious and Exalted Lord. However, acts of obedient worship do exalt a man in human society.

DIVINE FAVORS

The Exalted One therefore grants this world to those who strive for the Hereafter. As for those who forget or give no thought to the Hereafter, but work for worldly things alone, the very things they work for fail to make them happy.

If you should be asked: “Do you fear Allāh, Exalted is He?” say nothing in reply and let silence be your answer. If you say: “Yes, I do fear Him,” you will be lying since those who truly fear Allāh are incapable of disobedience and can never sin. If, on the other hand, you give the answer: “I do not fear Him,” you will be making yourself an unbeliever. The best answer to this question is silence.

One of the great favors the Exalted One has granted the Community of Muhammad, is this: He keeps our lives short and rewards every good deed of ours at least ten times over.

Another favor of His is this: If anyone sincerely repents for a sin he has com mitted and resolves not to repeat the same sin, he obtains pardon and forgiveness as if he never committed that sin at all.

Finally, one of Allāh’s great favors—perhaps the greatest of all—is making us belong to none other than His Beloved, the venerable Muhammad, on him be peace. On the coming Day of Resurrection, our Master, the Lord’s Beloved, will gather My Community like a shepherd gathering his flock. He will deliver them from the fire and torment of Hell with a compassion more tender and gentle even than that of a mother seeking her sons on the field of battle. In that awful place he will lead them to salvation and let them drink their fill from the ocean of his intercession.

Another of Allāh's favors to the Community of Muhammad is that their offenses will be hidden from other communities at the Place of Resurrection at the Reckoning.

The guilty members of the Community of Muhammad will enter the Fire as divine justice demands, but their punishments will be less severe than those suffered by the unbelievers, nor will they stay there forever.

Another divine favor to the Community of Muhammad: Three classes of the Community will be admitted to Paradise without reckoning and without punishment, a favor granted to no previous community. As a further divine favor, no member of the earlier communities will be able to enter Paradise before the Community of Muhammad.

Another favor: when a member of the Community of Muhammad commits a sin, it is not immediately recorded but deferred. Rewards, on the other hand, are recorded immediately with absolutely no delay. Each sin counts only as one, whereas each reward is recorded ten times over.

Another divine favor: repentance will be accepted of disobedient and sinful members of the Community of Muhammad right up to the moment of death.

Another of the innumerable favors divinely confined upon the Community of Muhammad: Any spot on earth can be a mosque for the worship of Allāh.

When the Day of Resurrection comes and all people are gathered at the Place of Assembly, a divine herald will call: “Where are the people of virtue? Come to Paradise!” A group will immediately set out for Paradise and the angels will ask them: “We see you going to Paradise without having faced the Reckoning. Who could you be to deserve this great favor?”

That blessed group will reply: “We are the people of virtue who were summoned a moment ago. Of His grace and favor, the Exalted Lord has admitted us to Paradise without reckoning.” The angels will then ask them: “By what kind of deeds and what kind of behavior did you achieve this degree of virtue?” They will say: “We attained this grace because we bore with patience the wrong that was done to us and because we pardoned those who did that wrong.”

The angels will congratulate them, saying: “Come, enter Paradise. You truly deserve it because of your character and conduct. See how beautifully you are rewarded for acting in accordance with the command of the Exalted Lord.”

At that moment a second herald will call: “Let the people of patience also enter Paradise!”

A mighty throng will set out for Paradise in compliance with this command. The angels will meet them, asking: “Where are you going without having faced the Reckoning?” That fortunate throng will reply: “We are the people of patience. We have been given permission to enter Paradise without reckoning.” The angels will then ask them: “How did you reach this stage?” They will reply: “In our lives on earth, when we were steadfast and patient in the face of all misfortunes. This is how the Most Glorious Lord has now rewarded us.”

The angels will praise them as they speed them on their way to Paradise, saying: “In that case, Paradise is for you. See how beautiful is the reward for your patience in adversity.”

Later, another herald will cry on behalf of the All-Merciful: “You who love one another for Allāh’s sake, where are you? Come to Paradise on High!”

At that a group will set out on the road to Paradise. When the angels stop them to ask how they are going to Paradise without reckoning, they will receive this reply: “In our lives on earth we loved one another for the sake of Allāh without ulterior motive or consideration. As a result, our Lord has raised us to this station.”

The angels will then congratulate them, saying: “Come then, Paradise is yours. See how beautiful is the divine favor conferred upon those who love one another for the sake of Allāh and in Allāh’s cause.”

After these three groups of the Saved and Successful have entered Paradise, the Balance will be set up, people will be called to account and everyone will go to the place he properly deserves.

We know all these favors through our blessed Master, the Messenger of Allāh. This is the advice of the Glorious Prophet, to those seekers who wish to achieve this lofty station and to enter Paradise on high: If someone who has wronged you begs you to forgive him, you should pardon him. As the noble Imām °Alī said. “The Day when the victim has the oppressor at his

mercy will be more dreadful and violent than the day the oppressor wronged his victim.”

THE VIRTUE OF FORGIVENESS

The Prince and the Man He Wrongfully Imprisoned

A prince wrongfully imprisoned an innocent man. The wretched victim languished in chains for many long years, until his hour came and he felt the pangs of death. Sending for the director of the prison, he handed him a letter and made him swear to deliver it to the prince. Soon after this he surrendered his soul and passed on to the Hereafter.

The prison governor did not dare to excite the prince’s anger by giving him the letter. That night, he saw the victim in a dream and heard from him this justifiable reproach:

“Governor, you feared the prince’s wrath so much that you could not give him the letter I entrusted to you. Let me now remind you that no one can save you from the anger of the Prince of princes. Fear Him, not your earthly prince, and deliver my letter for me.”

This warning brought the governor to his senses. He went to the prince the very next day, explained matters to him and submitted the letter. This is what the wronged man had written:

“The innocent victim you wrongfully imprisoned has now left this world. The tyrant, who left him rotting and moaning in chains for so many years, must soon follow his victim. At the Resurrection, Gabriel will take us both into the presence of God, where the victim will be avenged on his oppressor. The Judge on that Day will be Allāh, the Lord of Glory. That Supreme Judge has no need of evidence, proof or witnesses. The facts of the case will emerge in the presence of that Absolute Judge and divine justice will surely be done.”

On reading this letter, the prince was filled with remorse. He wept and moaned, but to what avail? The case was now before the Court of God.

The tyrant must one day suffer cruel pain; He who destroys another’s house must see the ruin of his own.

Be counted among the people of virtue: forgive the wrongdoer who seeks your pardon for the wrong he has done you. Endure with patience the misfortunes that befall you, striving to become one of those patient people so dear to the Exalted Lord. Love your brother selflessly, without expecting anything in return; treat him generously for Allāh’s sake, that you may enter Paradise without interrogation or reckoning. The most generous of men is he who gives without waiting to be asked.

THE VIRTUE OF GENEROSITY

A Couple Reunited Through the Generosity of Imām Husayn

It was during the reign of his father, Mu°āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, that Yazīd the Damned saw and fell in love with Umm Khālid, the wife of °Adī ibn Hātim. His passion prevented him from eating or drinking and he fell sick. Neither friends nor doctors could diagnose the real cause of his illness.

Mu°āwiya's councilor, °Amr ibn al-°Ās, was the first to recognize the true nature of the malady. He could tell that it was a case of lovesickness, but he could not determine who was the object of Yazīd's passion. He advised Mu°āwiya that only Yazīd's mother would be able to discover this secret. It did not take this lady long to find out her son was in love with a married woman called Umm Khālid. Mu°āwiya and °Amr conferred together over this problem. The unhappy father asked his councilor how they could find a remedy. "It will cost money," said °Amr ibn al-°Ās. He then went on to explain: "First you must send gifts to Umm Khālid's husband, inviting him to come from Medina the Illumined to your palace in Damascus. Then we shall consider what needs to be done." This advice was followed. The lady's husband received a royal welcome on his arrival. But now the real difficulty began. The Caliph consulted his councilor: "We invited the man and he came," said he. "Fine, but what shall we do now?" °Amr ibn al-°Ās thereupon disclosed his plan:

"Summon him to your court again tomorrow and entertain him with generous favors. Then ask him casually whether or not he is married. Naturally, he will say he is married. At that point, you must slap your knees in a show of disappointment, though without explaining why. Repeat the whole performance the day after that, then leave the rest to me."

Everything went according to plan. The Caliph feigned great disappointment, muttering vague expressions of regret when °Adī ibn Hātim said he was married. °Amr met °Adī as soon as he left the court, asking him how the Caliph had treated him. °Adī described his cordial

reception and the generous favors he had received, then added: “There was just one thing I could not figure out. The Caliph asked me if I was married and he seemed quite upset when I told him I was. I could not make any sense of this.”

°Amr ibn al-°Ās chuckled to himself and said: “What is so strange about that? He obviously wanted to make you his son-in-law by giving you his daughter in marriage. He was sorry to hear that this was impossible, since you were married already. Kings do not give their daughters as co-wives.”

°Adī’s greed was suddenly aroused by the glittering prospect of becoming son-in-law to the Caliph. “How can we put things to rights?” he asked. °Amr could barely conceal his delight at the way his scheme was working out. “There’s nothing to it,” he said. “If the Caliph should ask you the same question again, just say that you are unmarried.”

°Adī ibn Hātim was again received at court and the Caliph asked, in the course of conversation: “Are you married, by the way?” This time °Adī replied: “No, Commander of the Believers, I am not married.”

“Well,” said the Caliph, “since you say you are not married, let us hear you swear that if you did have a wife you would divorce her irrevocably.” The Caliph then turned immediately to a waiting scribe, giving the command: “Record this statement of °Adī ibn Hātim and confirm his repudiation of his wife.” The clerk obeyed and so the divorce was duly recorded and confirmed.

Umm Khālid was now divorced from her husband. After the waiting period prescribed by Islamic law had elapsed, Mu°āwiya sent the venerable Abū Hurayra to carry a proposal of marriage to the lady on behalf of his son, Yazīd. The emissary was provided with plenty of money and other gifts to take to her in Medina the Illumined.

On his arrival in Medina, the venerable Abū Hurayra met °Umar's son, °Abdullāh. W hen the latter had heard the story, he said: "O Abū Hurayra, since Umm Khālid is now a free woman, I appoint you my agent to seek her hand in marriage on my behalf." Abū Hurayra accepted this commission also.

Abū Hurayra then encountered °Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr, who also wished to have his suit presented to Umm Khālid. Abū Hurayra agreed to act on his behalf as well.

Finally, Abū Hurayra met the venerable Husayn, that Prince of Paradise, light of the eyes of those who follow the blessed Prophet, the beloved grandson of the Messenger, the son of the Valiant Lion and of Fātima the Radiant. He too appointed Abū Hurayra his agent in seeking the hand of Umm Khālid.

Thus it came about that the venerable Abū Hurayra was representing four suitors by the time he reached the house of Umm Khālid. After saluting the lady, he explained the purpose of his visit: "Umm Khālid, my child," said he, "You have been divorced by your husband, °Adī ibn Hātim, and the prescribed waiting period has elapsed. You are now free to marry anyone you choose. Mu°āwiya sent me. He wants you for his son Yazīd. On my way here, however, I met °Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr, °Abdullāh ibn °Umar and the venerable Imām Husayn, all of whom wish to marry you. Should

you accept any of these four to be your husband, I am authorized to represent each of them. Let me marry you to the one you prefer."

"O Abū Hurayra," cried Umm Khalid in amazement, "please tell me something about these four suitors of mine!" Abū Hurayra replied: "Mu°āwiya's son Yazīd has worldly wealth but no religion. The two °Abdullāhs are prosperous in both the worldly and religious domains. As for the venerable Imām Husayn, he has religious wealth but none of the worldly kind."

Umm Khālid bowed her head, saying: "I shall follow your advice, Abū Hurayra. I shall marry whichever of these four you choose for me." Not wishing to accept such a responsibility, Abū Hurayra advised her to reach her own decision, but Umm Khālid insisted: "Abū Hurayra," she said, "if you had not been the one to bring the proposals, I should certainly have sought you out to ask your advice. As it is, you have come here as the actual agent of all my four suitors. Do give me your opinion. Tell me whom I would do best to marry. Wed me to the one you choose."

The venerable Abū Hurayra responded to this plea by saying: "My child, since you have asked my opinion and belief, I swear by Allāh that I must prefer the man who was kissed and embraced as a child by the Messenger of Allāh, on him be blessings and peace."

The matter was settled. The venerable Abū Hurayra married Umm Khālid to the venerable Husayn, may Allāh be pleased with him. He handed over to Umm Khālid the money and gifts from Mu°āwiya, then returned to Damascus, where he reported all these events to the Caliph. Mu°āwiya tried to upbraid him, saying: "You have given away the money and gifts we entrusted to your care," but Abū Hurayra chided the Caliph in return: "Did

you inherit those goods from your father?" he asked. "No, they come from the public treasury and so belong first to Allāh and then to the Messenger's grandson."

Poor °Adī ibn Hātim soon came to know of the trick that had been played on him. He went back to Medina the Illumined in great distress. In a state of confusion, he came sighing and sobbing to the venerable Imām Husayn, who asked him: "Do you miss your divorced wife, Umm Khālid? It seems to me that you are in despair and full of regret." The wretched °Adī sighed: "Yes, grandson of Allāh's Messenger, I am very remorseful and I miss her very much indeed."

The venerable Imām invited Umm Khālid to join them, then asked her in the presence of her former husband: "Umm Khālid, have I ever set hands upon you? Tell us truthfully." Umm Khālid was quite definite in her reply: "Far from it, Imām!"

"In that case," said Imām Husayn, "I set you free. Go and remarry your former husband!" Turning to °Adī ibn Hātim, he then said: "°Adī, I prefer that you should marry Umm Khālid. Go with an easy heart and make her happy."

The sadly separated couple was thus reunited. They went home rejoicing and spent the rest of their lives in happy good fortune, never ceasing to bless the venerable Imām Husayn, may Allāh be pleased with him.

Such is magnanimity and virtue. As heirs of Imām Husayn, those members of the Community of Muhammad who possess these qualities will enter

Paradise without interrogation, torment or punishment, and they will be together with him there.

As for Mu°āwiya's son Yazīd, the historians tell us that this incident contributed more than any other disagreement to his hatred of the venerable Imām Husayn.

Yazīd bore a lifelong grudge against him and, as we know, exacted a terrible revenge. As the saying goes, however: "Ask for the victim and the oppressor will point to himself." Yazīd will be remembered with imprecations and loathing until the Day of Resurrection and Judgment, while the venerable Imām Husayn will be blessed forever with loving compassion and respect.

The venerable Imām Husayn was the dearly beloved grandson of our blessed Master the Prophet. His mother was Fātima the Radiant, the most noble of women, mother of the pure Imāms. His noble father was the Commander of the Believers, our Master °Alī ibn Abī Tālib ibn °Abd al-Muttalib.

THE NOBLE LIFE AND MARTYRDOM OF IMĀM HUSAYN

It was in the fourth year of the Hijra that our Master the venerable Husayn came to adorn this world, in Medina the Pure, on the fifth day of Sha°bān. It was fifty nights after the birth of his brother, the venerable Imām Hasan, that he was conceived in the womb of the noble Fātima. It was none other than our Master, the glorious Messenger, who performed the ritual of inserting his blessed saliva into the newborn baby's mouth. It was his

blessed lips that recited the Call to Prayer in the infant's ear, prayed for him and gave him the exalted name Husayn when he was seven days old. It was he who made the sacrifice for his grandson at the time of the naming ceremony.

The venerable Imām Husayn, so dearly loved by the glorious Messenger, was courageous and bold, learned, pious, eloquent, fluent and concise, a fine and moving speaker, in every respect pleasing to the Lord, in Whom he placed all his trust. According to the venerable Abū Hurayra, the Messenger to Men and Jinn would use words like: "Where is the tiny fellow?" when looking for the venerable Husayn as he sat in his noble Mosque. The venerable Husayn would come running immediately, sit on our blessed Master's lap, hug him affectionately, then run his fingers through the blessed beard of the noble Messenger. The King of Prophets would then kiss the venerable Husayn, saying: "O my Lord, I love this child. May You also love my Husayn and those who love him."

Once, after the blessed time of the Prophet, the venerable °Abdullāh ibn °Umar was sitting in the shade of the honored Ka°ba when he saw our Master, the venerable Husayn, approaching. Turning to those at his side, he said: "Here comes the person most dear to those in heaven of all the people on earth." As he said these words he pointed to the venerable Husayn.

Pressing himself against the honored Ka°ba, Imām Husayn communed with Allāh, the Lord of Glory, saying: "My God, You have blessed me with Your bounties in abundance yet You have found me ungrateful. O Lord, You have put me to the test, yet You have found me impatient. In spite of my ingratitude, You have not deprived me; in spite of my impatience, You have not prolonged my hardship. My God, nothing but grace and generosity flows from the All-Generous."

He always accompanied and served his noble father, Imām °Alī, while he was in Medina the Illumined. He also went with him to Kūfa. He fought alongside his revered father in all his battles and stood by him constantly until his martyrdom. After that he was with his brother, the venerable Hasan. After the latter resigned from the Caliphate, he returned to Medina the Illumined where he stayed until the year 60 of the Hijra, near the fragrant resting place of his noble grandfather, the final Prophet.

According to Imām Suyūtī: “In the year 60, the people of Syria paid homage to Yazīd. Yazīd the Damned sent men to Medina the Illumined to call on the people there to pay homage to him also. Imām Hasan, Ibn °Umar and °Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr, may Allāh be pleased with them all, refused allegiance to Yazīd. °Abdullāh ibn °Umar said: “I shall not pay homage to Yazīd as long as there is no general consensus to give him allegiance.” That same night he left Medina the Illumined and moved to Mecca the Ennobled.

°Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr would neither pay homage to Yazīd himself nor call on other people to do so.

As for the venerable Imām Husayn, since he had been appointed heir to the throne by Yazīd’s father, he was invited by the people of Kūfa. The Kūfans kept writing letters urging him to come to their city. In spite of this the noble Imām neither accepted their invitation nor agreed with the Kūfans’ line of action. Since homage had been paid to Yazīd, he was faced with making a decision either to stay as he was or to respond to the Kūfans’ invitation. He was finding it impossible to decide where his duty lay. He eventually consulted Ibn Zubayr, who advised him to accept the invitation of the Kūfans.

The venerable Ibn °Abbās, however, saw things differently: “Beware of accepting the Kūfans’ invitation, O Imām,” said he. “The Kūfans betrayed both your father, Imām °Alī, and your elder brother, Imām Hasan. The people of Kūfa are not to be taken at their word.”

°Abdullāh ibn °Umar also advised him to beware of leaving Medina the Illumined. However, what had been divinely decreed would come to pass. Imām Husayn had decided to go to °Irāq. The venerable Ibn °Abbās implored him not to go but he could not persuade the venerable Imām to change his mind. “O Husayn,” he pleaded, “I swear by Allāh that you are likely to be slain like the venerable °Uthmān in the midst of your own family.” When this was of no avail, Ibn °Abbās said: “O Husayn, by going to °Irāq, you are leaving the Hijāz[1] to Ibn al-Zubayr.” Still he could not sway the venerable Imām, whose resolve was unshakable. He could not abandon the Community of Muhammad to a depraved ruler.

Meanwhile, the people of °Irāq were sending a stream of couriers with letters of invitation. Finally, on the tenth of Dhū-l Hijja, the venerable Husayn set out from Mecca the Ennobled with his family and retinue and started on the road to °Irāq. Several members of the Prophet’s household traveled with him. In reality the people who invited the venerable Husayn to °Irāq were mischief-makers working for the cause of Yazīd. When Yazīd heard of his departure for °Irāq, he sent written orders to °Ubaydullāh ibn Zayyād, commanding him to take military action against the venerable Husayn. On receiving these orders from Yazīd, the accursed Ibn Zayyād dispatched four thousand troops, under the command of °Umar ibn Sa°d, against the venerable Imām.

As for the people of Kūfa, they gave the venerable Imām no more help than they had given his father before him. Indeed, they did not even attempt to join him. Some of the Kūfans who had invited him to °Irāq were actually

enrolled among the four thousand troops sent to oppose the venerable Husayn.

Seeing himself surrounded by four thousand armed soldiers, the venerable Imām Husayn made it known that he was willing to return to the Hijāz in order to save his people from being cursed because of his murder, but he said that the proper course was either to pay homage to Yazīd or else risk battle. Rejecting the idea of returning to the Hijāz, he entered the fray. The die was cast and there was no going back. They slew and martyred that beloved grandson of the Prince of the Universe, that dear child of Fātima, the best of women; they cut off his blessed head and brought it in a basin before the accursed Ibn Zayyād.

Surely the curse of Allāh falls upon evildoers. [11:18] Surely we belong to Allāh and to Him we are returning. [2:156]

It is said that when the venerable Imām Husayn knew for sure that the approaching army would do battle with him, he gathered his companions and the members of the Prophet's household and delivered this brief sermon:

"Praise and thanks to the Lord God and blessings and peace upon the noble Messenger ...

"O my companions, relatives, friends and fellow members of the Prophet's household! You see the state of affairs we have reached. This world has changed and turned its face from us. Its goodness has retreated and very evil days lie before us. You must surely see that the truth is no longer put

into practice. Falsehood is by no means at an end. Let those who are believers desire to meet Allāh. For me there is no doubt that death is a blessing. I count it a crime to live in the company of tyrants."

May Allāh be pleased with him and make him pleased.

His martyrdom occurred on the day of °Āshūrā, the tenth of Muharram of the year 60, at a place in °Irāq called Karbalā', which lies between Hilla and Kūfa. Martyred with him on that day were twenty-three members of his household. These twenty-three victims came of the pure line of our Master, the noble Messenger, and were close relatives of the revered Prophet. Among those martyred were cousins of our blessed Master, children of the venerable Hasan and the infant children of our Master the venerable Husayn, except for his son, Zayn al-°Ābidīn. The tears of the ladies of the Prophet's household flowed like the Nile and Euphrates and their sighs and moans reached the Throne-on-High and made the soul of Fātima the Radiant weep. They distressed the blessed soul of the Prophet and threw the angels and jinn into mourning.

When her noble brother Husayn was martyred, Zaynab screamed through her tears at the cruel murderer: "You tyrants! You do not know what you have done, whom you have martyred and whom you have caused to weep. How will you answer the glorious Prophet if he asks you on the coming Day of Resurrection: 'What did you do to the people of my household and to my children after I was gone? Some you made captive, some you enslaved and some you steeped in crimson blood. How will you look him in the face and how can you expect his intercession if he says: 'Is this how you display your gratitude to your Prophet? Is this how you show your affection?' Will you not be ashamed of yourselves if he says: 'Would you dare to drink water from the fount of the Messenger, when you condemned

the people of my household to go thirsty and refused a single drop of water to my beloved Husayn and his Innocents?’”

On those roads, in those deserts throughout those lonely wastes,

Houries and jinn bewail poor Zaynab’s fate.

On the night when Imām Husayn was martyred, our Mother Umm Salama[2], may Allāh be pleased with her, dreamt that she saw the most noble Messenger looking sorrowful and sad. She asked the reason for his grief and received this reply: “O Umm Salama, they have martyred my Husayn, that is why I am full of sorrow and despair.”

Such cruelty the turning spheres had never known

The glorious Messenger was in despair, there by the most high Throne

The venerable Ibn °Abbās had a vision in the middle of the day, in which he saw our blessed Master holding a bottle full of blood. “What blood is that, O Messenger of Allāh?” he asked. The answer came: “This is the blood and tears of my Husayn and the people of my household. I am gathering from the ground the blood and tears they shed this day.” The venerable Ibn °Abbās checked the date and found that his vision had occurred on the day when the venerable Husayn was martyred.

Our Mother, the venerable Umm Salama, said: “I heard the jinn weeping and mourning the venerable Husayn.”

We should not be surprised to hear that the very jinn wept at the martyrdom of Imām Husayn. All the angels in heaven and earth were weeping. Sun, moon, stars and all the heavenly bodies trembled and made moan for fear of Allāh.

How beautiful are these words of Sayyid Jalīl Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad ibn Rufā°ī in his elegy for the venerable Husayn: “Heaven and earth wept for the martyr cruelly wronged, as he lay with his radiant countenance all stained with blood. The blessed hands of Imām Husayn, so thirsty when he fell a martyr by the sword, were powerful enough to make the oceans flow.”

While people at the Resurrection drink Kawthar’s water from Haydar’s hand,

You lie a thirsty martyr, O Husayn, in Karbalā’s desert sand.

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Even as the treacherous Shimr was pinning him down and preparing to make him a martyr, Imām Husayn addressed these words to the man who refused him water: “You made me and my children wander thirsty in these desert wastes. You gave me no water and I know better than to expect any from you. But at least give my children a drop to drink, so that I may forgive you for the great wrong you have done to us.”

That brigand's only reply was to say: "If earth and sky were full of water, I would not give one drop to you and your children."

The venerable Imām Husayn then said to the accursed Shimr: "You have denied me water and refused my children even one drop. But at the Place of Resurrection we shall not sink to your level by letting you go thirsty. For the owner of Kawthar is my grandfather and the water bearer of that fountain in Paradise is my father."

He then quickly kicked the ground, from which a crystal spring burst forth. Pointing to this water, he said to the accursed Shimr, whose eyes had opened wide in amazement: "Now you see the quality of our patience. We have only suffered like this in order to teach the Community and make them understand that they must be prepared to sacrifice everything they have, when they engage in a necessary struggle against the tyrannical and the corrupt. Otherwise, water was at our command. If we had wished, we could have drawn it up and drunk it before now. We refrained from doing so, however, in order to set the Community of Muhammad an example of self-sacrifice." As soon as he had uttered these words, the wine of martyrdom quenched his thirst.

O Lord, do not deprive us of the Intercession of Husayn ...

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The accursed Ibn Zayyād sent the blessed head of our Master Husayn to Yazīd the Damned, who was safe and sound in Damascus, waiting impatiently for the fruits of his crime. Also sent to him were Imām Husayn's beloved son, Imām Zayn al-°Abidīn, and sister, the venerable Zaynab. The child and his aunt had been at Karbalā' that day, but they had been too sick to take part in the fighting and had somehow survived.

The ill-famed Yazīd stuck that blessed head on a rod in his hand and dared to mock it, carrying his disrespect for the Messenger's family to an extreme degree. He appeared enormously pleased with his criminal act, never thinking that he would be damned and cursed till the Day of Resurrection, not only by all the Muslims but by all men of conscience and common sense.

Even this did not satisfy Yazīd the Damned. He gave orders for the blessed head to be exhibited throughout the lands of Islam. Only when he heard of the discontent expressed by all the Muslims when they heard of the martyrdom of Imām Husayn, did he feel compelled to send the Imām's noble relatives back to Medina in safety. The blessed head of the venerable Husayn was sent to °Asqalān (Ascalon), where the local governor had it buried.

When Ascalon was captured much later by the Crusaders, a Fātimid vizier called Sālih Talā°ī paid a lot of money to buy the blessed head from them. He received it with a great military parade. He bore the blessed head of the venerable Husayn upon his own head, set it upon an ebony throne and wrapped it in green silk. He had a casket made out of solid gold and lined with musk. The blessed head was placed in this casket and laid to rest in a special mausoleum in the Mosque of Husayn, which that vizier had built in Cairo. Despite the inevitable differences of opinion about what did actually become of that blessed head, the great saints and most Sufis maintain that it

does indeed repose in Masjid al-Husayn in Cairo, where it is visited every day by the Qutb (Cardinal Saint) of our age.

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THE SEVEN WITNESSES TO ALL OUR DEEDS

Whatever you do, whether your conduct is good or evil, be sure that seven witnesses are watching you. They will testify for or against you in the Divine Court.

1) The noble angels.

And the angels also bear witness ... [4:166].

2) The ground you walk on.

And man cries: ‘What’s the matter with her?’ That day she will tell her news. [99:3-4].

3) The time you spend. Every day, minute or second wasted in heedlessness is a witness to what you do.

4) The words you utter. Every word or sentence you utter will testify to your condition:

On the day when their tongues shall testify against them ... [24:24].

5) All the organs of your body:

Today We set a seal on their mouths, but their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet bear witness to what they have been acquiring. [36:65].

6) The noble recording angels assigned to you personally:

But over you there are guardians watching, noble recorders, who know what you are doing. [82:10-12].

7) The record of your deeds. Over and above these seven witnesses, the Exalted Lord Himself observes all that we do or say:

Allāh is Witness to all that you do. [3:98]. Allāh is Observant of His servants. [3:20].

Let us remember that all these witnesses observe our good deeds as well as the bad! ...

In honor of Tāhā and Yāsīn and the people of Yāsīn ... Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Majesty beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and praise be to Allāh, Lord of All the Worlds ...

NOTES

[1]The part of Arabia where the Holy Cities are situated.

[2]One of the Mothers of the Believers, i.e., the wives of the blessed Prophet.

THE THIRTY-FIRST DISCOURSE

Repentance and the Light of Guidance

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Bless the Intercessor for our sins, Muhammad

Bless the Physician of our hearts, Muhammad

The First is Allāh; the Last is Allāh; the Outer is Allāh; the Inner is Allāh. He who has Allāh in his heart, has Allāh as his Helper in both domains.

Lord, open my breast and ease my task for me. Unloose a knot from my tongue, that they may understand my words ... [20:27]

I entrust my affairs to Allāh; surely Allāh sees His servants. [40:44]

Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. You are indeed All-Knowing and Wise.

Glory be to You! We have no understanding except what you have given us to understand. Surely You are the Munificent and Generous One.

Believers, repent to Allāh in all sincerity; maybe your Lord will acquit you of your evil deeds, and admit you to gardens beneath which rivers flow, on

the day when Allāh will not humiliate the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their light will run on before them and on their right hands. They will say: ‘Our Lord, perfect for us our light, and forgive us; surely You are Capable of all things.’ [66:8]

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THE WAY TO SALVATION

The light that runs on before those sincerely penitent believers, is the Mighty Qur’ān and the noble Messenger, the Glory of the Universe. The light on their right hands is the light of their faith, mingling with the light in front of them ...

THE “PEOPLE OF FELICITY”

As the believers know, there are two sets of human beings living on this earth, in this visible world: the People of Felicity and the People of Misery. The fortunate ones are believers, people of faith, while the miserable ones are sinners wandering in error and unbelief. In the World-to-Come there are two places, two abodes, namely Paradise and Hell. The blessed will go to Paradise, while the wretched will be sent to Hell, to dwell forever in its fire.

1) Considering the Hereafter superior to the life of this world. Contentment during this life, with a longing and yearning for the Hereafter, because the life of this world is temporary and fleeting, while that of the Hereafter is permanent and eternal.

2) Complete sincerity in all acts of worship; constant reading of the Holy Qur'ān. While the ignorant perish, the scholars are saved. When the scholars perish, those are saved who sincerely practice what they have learned. Constant reading of the Holy Qur'ān means reciting it with the tongue, believing it in the heart, observing its commands and prohibitions and acting in accordance with its laws.

3) Avoidance of nonsensicalities, that is empty, useless and idle words.

4) Correct performance of the five daily prayers, in calm humility, at the proper times and—whenever possible—in congregation.

5) Careful avoidance of all unlawful or suspect things, little or much, in private or public.

Allāh, Glorious is His Majesty, said to Moses, on him be peace: "Moses, but for those righteous and pious people who praise and extol Me, who weep from fear and awe of Me and shun unlawful and suspicious things, I should not have sent one drop of mercy down to earth, I should not have caused the grass to grow ...

6) Keeping righteous company. The righteous keep company only with the righteous, just as the ignorant and the immoral enjoy the company of their own kind. Habits are picked up from those one frequents.

7) Humility. Arrogance is the corresponding mark of wretchedness.

8) Generosity. The generous man is the friend of Allāh, Exalted is He, while the stingy miser is His foe.

All the Prophets and Messengers have been munificent and generous, especially our blessed Master, the Glory of the Universe. Paradise-on-High is the home of the generous. Generosity is a branch stretching down to earth from Paradise-on-High. Anyone who grasps that branch will be pulled up to Paradise.

9) Compassion for all divinely created beings. Allāh, Exalted is He, has compassion for those who are compassionate toward His creatures.

Have mercy and compassion for those on earth. Those in heaven will have mercy on you.

It is most important for Muslims to observe the rights of unbelievers and of animals, as well as those of their fellow Muslims.

Sheikh Ahmad al-Ghazālī Admonishes His Famous Brother

Sheikh Ahmad al-Ghazālī was conversing one day with his brother, the famous Imām al-Ghazālī, to whom he remarked: “All your knowledge and all your weighty books can be summed up in two sentences:

Have respect for God’s command; Have compassion for God’s creatures.”

Imām Shāfī°ī and the Sparrows’ Nest

While he was a judge in Egypt, Imām Shāfī°ī found that some sparrows had made a nest among his books. The nest was spoiling his library, so he destroyed it. After his death, he appeared in a dream to a lady called Sayyida Khātūn, whom he had greatly respected during his lifetime, telling her that he had been reprimanded for spoiling the birds’ nest and asking her to put out some food for the birds where she was.

Sayyida Khātūn did what the venerable Imām had asked of her. Shortly afterwards, she saw him again in a dream. “Allāh be pleased with you,” he said, “for having delivered me from my pain.”

10) Helpfulness to other creatures. Do good to others if you can, but at least cause them no harm. If you know how to speak well and how to give good ad vice, then speak and tell the truth. Otherwise, keep your mouth shut! Be useful to mankind, not harmful ...

11) Never forgetting death. Those who never forget death are always penitent. They do not spoil their repentance and are always prepared to die.

FIVE MARKS OF THOSE WHO LOVE ALLĀH, GLORIFIED AND EXALTED IS HE:

i. Generosity like the ocean.

ii. Tender kindness like the sun.

iii. Humility like the dust.

iv. Gentleness like death.

v. Discretion like the night.

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NINE BLESSINGS FOR THOSE WHO REGULARLY PERFORM THEIR PRAYERS:

According to the venerable °Uthmān, our blessed Master said: “If someone regularly performs the five daily prayers at the proper times, Allāh confers nine special blessings on that person:

i. Allāh, Glorious is His Majesty, loves that servant of His.

ii. That servant’s body becomes healthy.

iii. The angels protect that person from all forms of evil.

iv. Blessings descend upon his house and become manifest there.

v. A radiance, peculiar to righteous people, begins to shine in his face.

vi. Allāh softens that servant’s heart, filling it with compassion and tender kindness.

vii. He will cross the bridge like lightning and Allāh will grant him salvation from the Fire.

viii. He will be resurrected along with the saints and the righteous.

ix. He will have no cause to fear the terrors of the hereafter, nor be sorry for those he leaves behind in this world.

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THE KEYS TO SALVATION: SINCERE REPENTANCE, LOVE OF ALLĀH AND OF HIS BLESSED MESSENGER.

We have a long journey ahead of us and we must be ready and prepared to travel, for the signal to start will come suddenly, without warning. We must therefore be ever penitent for our sins and transgressions. As we were told in the verses of the Qur'ān at the beginning of this chapter, our repentance must be sincere, so that we do not lapse back into sin. We must love Allāh and His Messenger very much indeed. After faith in Allāh, Exalted is He, the causes of salvation and success are reverence, honor and affection for the Prophet, on him be peace. Affection for the Messenger gives rise to affection for Allāh. Entering by the Messenger's gate, we arrive at the Truth. Love and affection for our blessed Master are the key to bliss and salvation. Belonging like him to the human race, we have a natural aptitude for loving him. Once we have acquired that love, the love of Allāh will automatically arise in our hearts. As the Qur'ān tells us:

Whoever obeys the Messenger, thereby obeys Allāh. [4:80]

Just as obedience to the Messenger, on him be peace, necessitates obedience to Allāh, Exalted is He, so does love for the glorious Prophet necessitate love for Allāh, the Lord of Majesty ... The first symptom of that love is careful observance of the Prophetic example, the Sunna. He who loves our blessed Master becomes a king in both worlds.

Obedient to the Divine Command, Moses—on him be peace—Gives a Proper Burial to a Man Thought to be Wholly Evil

In the time of Moses, on him be peace, there lived a very wicked and malicious man. As every mortal must, he eventually breathed his last. His neighbors had such a low opinion of him that they did not give him a proper funeral. They simply threw him into a hole.

Allāh, Glorious is He, said to Moses: “Take that man out of the hole. Wash and enshroud him, pray over him and give him a proper burial.” The venerable Moses promptly carried out this command, but when he had done so the people asked: “Why did you see fit to treat him like that, when he was such an evil man?”

The venerable Moses told them that he was obeying the command of Allāh. Then he went to Mount Sinai and prayed: “O my Lord, I have carried out Your command, but everybody is complaining that he was a very bad man,” Allāh replied: “He was indeed a disobedient servant. Nevertheless, I considered him worthy of this treatment. One day, as he was reading the noble Torah, he kissed the verses which describe My Beloved, whom I have praised and extolled in all My scriptures. I love everyone who loves My Beloved.”

As it is said: “A man is together with those he loves.” Let us there fore love the blessed Messenger and his heirs, and be together with them ...

A Notorious Brigand Respects a Noble Lady, a Descendant of the Blessed Messenger, and is Later Delivered from Execution

In the time of °Abdullāh ibn Tāhir there lived a ferocious brigand, who was extremely wicked and cruel. He wandered in the hills and waylaid caravans

in the mountain passes. This merciless highwayman and his bandits always managed to evade the authorities.

One year, the winter was very severe. That fierce brigand and his men withdrew to their secret hideout. One day there was a knock on the door. The caller was a noble lady, lovely to look at and softly spoken. She explained that she belonged to the pure lineage of our blessed Master and that she was in need of their aid. She added that she could not accept alms or charity, but only gifts. One of the brigands invited her inside, saying: “Please come in! It’s cold outside, don’t stand shivering at the door.”

Once the noble lady was inside, however, she had to defend herself against those shameless villains, who did not shrink from trying to assault a descendant of the Messenger. The bandit chief heard the uproar and arrived in time to rescue the lady from that pack of savage wolves. He begged her pardon and asked the reason for her visit. The noble lady told her sad tale, whereupon that cruel and ferocious brigand thundered out to those around him:

“Until this very day we have perpetrated every kind of wickedness. Are we going to ill-treat the descendants of our Master, the blessed and glorious Messenger, when we must hope for his intercession in the Hereafter? Are we doomed to be wretched brigands in the Afterlife, with our faces stained and soiled as they are here? How can we expect intercession from the Chief of the Prophets, if we treat his offspring like this?”

He then paid his respects to the noble lady, gave her a gift of money and sent her on her way, not forgetting to say: “Go in safety! And ask your honored ancestor to grant us his intercession and compassion.”

Now it happened that °Abdullāh ibn Tāhir, the ruler at that time, came to know the whereabouts of the brigands' lair. He had the hideout surrounded. Seeing that resistance was useless, the brigands surrendered. They were put on trial that same night and sentenced to be executed the following morning, as an example to the people.

On the eve of the execution, °Abdullāh ibn Tāhir saw our blessed Master in a dream. The Most Noble Messenger said to him: "O °Abdullāh, release the chief of the brigands. Set him free at once." The Amir awoke in terror. "Glory be to Allāh," he said to himself. "This dream is certainly genuine and true, for Satan cannot impersonate our blessed Master. In that case, how can it be that our Master is interceding on behalf of such a ferocious brigand?" He pondered for hours, but could not set his mind at rest. Deciding to reconsider in the morning before having the sentence carried out, he lay down and fell asleep. Again he dreamt of the blessed Messenger of Allāh, who commanded him to set the brigand chief free immediately. Too impatient to wait till morning, °Abdullāh had the brigand taken from jail and brought into his presence. "Have you had some dealings with Allāh and His Messenger?" he asked.

The brigand chief recounted what had happened and how he had saved a lady of the Messenger's line from the hands of his followers. °Abdullāh ibn Tāhir said to him: "Twice tonight I have seen the Messenger, on him be peace, in my dreams. Each time, he commanded me to release you. If Allāh wills, may you enjoy intercession in the Hereafter also, as you have been saved from execution in this life because of your kind service to a descendant of the Messenger. Now go. You are at liberty."

When he heard this, the robber at once repented and sought forgiveness for his sins.

The Lazy Dervish who Imagined he was a Perfect Man

A certain dervish supposed himself a perfect man. He applied to a spiritual guide, who took him into his service. It soon became apparent, however, that he was a terribly lazy fellow. If he performed his tasks at all, it was with great reluctance, for he did nothing wholeheartedly. Eventually, the teacher sent for him and said: “You have pretensions to dervish-hood, but you are incapable of serving a creature, let alone the Creator!”

All human beings, even if they be Prophets and saints, must have affection for the Most Perfect Messenger. It is through love of Muhammad that we pass on to love of Allāh.

WHY DOES ALLĀH ASK US TO HELP HIM AND HIS BLESSED MESSENGER?

Those whose repentance is honest and sincere, they are together with the Messenger of Allāh. Wishing for the light of perfect faith, they pray: “Our Lord, perfect for us our light!”

The Messenger, on him be peace, is a mighty light and the Qur’ān is also a clear light. Those who have these two lights before them and by their side, relying on the radiance they shed, will certainly not be left in darkness, ignorance and error:

So those who believe in him, and honor and support him, and follow the light sent down with him—it is they who will prosper. [7:157]

Allāh, Glorious is He, is devoid of all attributes of deficiency and qualified by all attributes of perfection. Allāh, Exalted is He, needs no assistance from any of His servants. Nevertheless, He says: “If you help Allāh, He will help you.”[1]

It is to test His servants that Allāh, Exalted is He, asks them to help Him, His Messenger and His religion. By this means they can come to understand the nature of service and learn to become true servants. Otherwise, Allāh, the Messenger and the religion of Islam have absolutely no need of human assistance. By helping Allāh, the Messenger and Islam, a servant learns the measure of his service to his Lord. He is able to assess his progress in love for the religion.

That is why the believers render aid and assistance to Allāh, to His Messenger and to the religion of Islam. In doing so, they are enlightened and saved by following the laws and commandments of the Holy Qur’ān. The Qur’ān is their light, as the final Prophet is their light.

“Perfect for us our light,” means: “Bring our faith to certainty.” In striving to save our faith from the darkness of the lower self, we depend on the light that comes through obeying the Holy Qur’ān and following the noble example set by the Prophet, on him be peace. The heart is like a plain, open to all the winds that blow, so we must struggle with the passions if we are to keep our faith intact. Those who obey Allāh and His Messenger will surely

enter Paradise and attain pure bliss. In gardens where rivers flow beneath the trees, blessings unimaginable await them there.

As for those who prefer to obey their lower selves, turning away from Allāh and His Messenger, they will face a painful torment:

Who obeys Allāh and His Messenger, He will admit him to gardens beneath which rivers flow; but whoever turns his back, He will inflict on him a painful punishment. [48:17]

THE NEED FOR TREATMENT FROM A “SPIRITUAL DOCTOR”

It is a great and lofty privilege to be capable of following Allāh and His Messenger. If someone is not personally up to that standard, he ought to follow the training prescribed by those saintly and righteous enough to qualify as guides. This is the only way to find a cure for the spiritual sickness of arrogance, sanctimonious pride, envy, hypocrisy, malice and anger, love of status, and love of material goods.

The perfect guide is a kind of spiritual doctor, who treats those afflicted by such inner maladies, prescribing the medicines of the Holy Qur’ān and the venerable Muhammad Mustafā, on him be peace. If the patient is capable of making a recovery, these prescriptions can effect a complete cure.

Those spiritual doctors teach their patients how to put everything to proper use. They explain how arrogance is to be transformed into charity, while the

irascible character needs to direct his anger against the enemy on the battlefield.

Just as revelation came to the Prophets, divine inspiration reaches the hearts of the saints, who are the heirs of the Prophets.

As we have said, things are very bleak and difficult in this world and in the Hereafter for those who disobey Allāh, and turn away from the glorious Messenger.

A Cautionary Tale: The Narrator of Traditions Whose Head Became the head of a Donkey

A visitor to a noble narrator of Prophetic Traditions was surprised to find his host behind a curtain, through which they held their conversation. Eventually, the visitor pleaded: “If only you would lift this curtain, sir, I could have the honor of beholding your beauteous countenance.”

The narrator of Traditions replied: “I would be ashamed to meet and shake hands with you without a curtain.”

The visitor pressed him: “My dear sir,” he said, “what is there to be ashamed of?”

The man behind the curtain then explained his strange behavior: “Very well,” he said, “You may as well hear my tale. Sometime ago I heard a noble Tradition related. Finding it contrary to my own reason and logic, I was foolish enough to reject its authenticity. That is how I came to suffer this punishment. As you see, I sit behind a curtain and cannot show my face to anyone. Unfortunately, the noble Tradition I dared to reject was the one meaning: ‘If during the congregational prayer, someone puts his head down in prostration before the Imām or gets up from prostration or bowing before the Imām, in the Hereafter that person will have a head like the head of an ass.’ Forgetting my limitations, I presumed to question how such a tiny fault could result in someone having his head turned into that of an ass. Allāh then turned my head into that of a donkey here in this world. That is why I cannot show my head to anyone.”

Having said this, he let the visitor see his head. It was indeed the head of a donkey.

If a man could have his head turned into the head of an ass just for doubting the sense of a noble Tradition, perhaps it is worth reflecting on the condition of those of us who flout the noble sacred law.

To follow a scholar who acts on his knowledge is indeed the cause of salvation, for scholars who practice their knowledge are the heirs of the revealed light. As for those who follow such a light, they will certainly see the obstacles, pitfalls and swamps in front of them, and will escape destruction.

Allāh, Glorious is He, said to his refined Beloved: ... and follows the tradition of Abraham, the upright. [4:125]

This glorious Verse confirms the necessity of following a scholar who acts in accordance with his knowledge. Your being is like an empty glass, while the practical scholar is in the position of a wine-bearer. The glass will remain forever empty unless it is filled with the wine of love, affection and obedience by the hand of such a wine-bearer. Or else a false guide or misleader may notice that your glass is empty and—Allāh forbid!—fill it with excrement.

The cup filled by the practical scholar is sanctified, clean and pure. As for the cup filled with the filth of those in error, it is filthy by nature and will remain so. By following a saint of Allāh who puts his knowledge into practice, a person achieves dignity and honor. He attains wisdom and intimacy, for the rivers of Paradise become the rivers of divine intimacy for those who reach this state.

In summary: external and internal works of righteousness constitute the means of admission to Paradise, for Allāh has given his promise to those who perform such works and Allāh, Glorified and Exalted is He, never goes back on his promise.

Why Ibrāhīm ibn Ad'ham Wept So Bitterly when he could not Afford the Admission Fee to the Public Bath

Ibrāhīm ibn Ad'ham, sanctified be his secret soul, tried to enter the public bath one day. "Hey dervish," said the bath keeper, "you need money to get into the bath. There is no free entry. Where's your cash?" The venerable saint bowed his head, saying: "I have no money."

The bath keeper was quite definite: “Those without money can not enter the bath.”

Ibrāhīm ibn Ad’ham gave a great cry and wept so bitterly that people gathered round to comfort him: “Hey dervish,” they said, “is it worth destroying yourself because they would not let you into the bath? Come on, do not cry, we shall give you the money to get in.”

Ibrāhīm ibn Ad’ham replied: “It is not because I cannot get into the bath that I’m weeping. My sighing and sobbing is due to a very different cause. The bath keeper’s insistence on the admission fee reminded me of something and that is why I am weeping. If we are not allowed to enter the bath in this base world here below, unless we pay the fee, I have no hope of being fit to enter Paradise in the Hereafter. How will it be for me there if they say: ‘What good deed have you brought? Show us so that we may let you into Paradise.’ Just as they keep you out of the worldly bath if you cannot pay, they will certainly not let you into Paradise in the Hereafter if you have no good deeds to your credit. Who has more reason than I to weep and moan?”

These words made the bystanders ponder deeply and brought tears to their eyes.

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THE STRUGGLE WITH OUR WORST ENEMY: OUR OWN LOWER SELF

Let me repeat: Your worst enemy is your own lower self. You must strive and struggle with that self at every breath. Work to change and transform its foul and blameworthy attributes into good characteristics. Strive to transform sanctimonious pride into humility, arrogance into modesty, envy into kindness and compassion, greed into contentment, love of status into satisfaction with your condition and perfect resignation, malice into pardon, lust and bestiality into angelic qualities.

The great saints of Allāh have said: “There is a Paradise-in-Advance here in this world, but most people have no desire to enter this Paradise though it is ready and accessible in this present life.”

Those who do enter this Paradise-on-Earth are those who transform their blameworthy attributes into fine qualities and who experience the purification of the heart and the illumination of the soul. Intelligent people therefore enter Paradise while still here and remain in the everlasting Paradise.

May Allāh grant us all His help and guidance.

Such are the people of felicity and these qualities are the marks of felicity. Allāh is Generous and Compassionate. His Generosity is so bountiful that it defies description by the human mind.

Some wise men say: “On the Day of Resurrection I would prefer to have my reckoning done, not by my mother and father, but by Allāh, in Person, for He is even kinder and more compassionate than my own parents.”

Since Allāh, Exalted is He, is the most Merciful of the merciful, no servant in his right mind could think of disobeying Him. It behooves the servant to serve. To obey his Lord is the servant’s most important duty. There is no doubt that forgiveness will be conferred upon a servant who obeys his Master, the Lord of Justice and Bountiful Favor. He will enter the Paradise of Essence and attain blessings without end.

O my Lord, grant us Your guidance. May Your divine aid go with us. Look not to our faults, but treat us with Your gracious kindness. Give us to Your Beloved. Help us to achieve sincere repentance. Transform our blameworthy habits into good character and praiseworthy qualities. Make us obedient to You, but let us not be proud of our obedience. Let our end and outcome be good. Grant that we may die in faith.

In honor of the Holy Qur’ān and in honor of the one He sent as a Mercy to all the Worlds ...

Glory to your Lord, the Lord Almighty, beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds ...

NOTES

[1]in tansurū-llāha yansurkum [47:7]

THE THIRTY-SECOND DISCOURSE

Belief and Practice

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Those who do not look forward to meeting with Us, but are pleased with the life of this world and feel content with it, and those who are heedless of Our signs, their abode is the Fire, for what they have been acquiring. Those who believe and do good works, their Lord will guide them because of their faith. Beneath them rivers flow in gardens of delight, in which their cry will be: ‘Glory to You, O Allāh!’ and where their greeting will be: ‘Peace!’ and their cries will end with: ‘Praise be to Allāh, Lord of all the worlds!’ [10:7-10].

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INTERPRETATION OF SŪRA YŪNUS

The noble commentators say that these blessed words are a kind of code between the denizens of Paradise and those who serve there. When the denizens of Paradise propose to hold a banquet, they say: “Glory to You, Allāh!” As soon as the servants of Paradise hear this they spring into action at once and produce the desired bounties by the hundreds. The food is infinitely varied and each kind has its own peculiar taste. After the people of Paradise have enjoyed these delicacies to their heart’s content, they say: “Praise be to Allāh.” The people of Paradise greet and salute one another with “Peace”, or it may be the angels who greet the people of Paradise and salute them thus. After glorifying God, the people of Paradise always conclude with the expression: “Praise be to Allāh.”

As soon as the People of Paradise enter there and witness the majesty and glory of the Exalted One, they sanctify and glorify Him. When they have extolled the bounties generously conferred by the All-Glorious Lord, the

noble angels come and congratulate the people of Paradise on their salvation from disaster and the Fire and on their obtaining these wonderful blessings. They give the believers to understand that they are safe from that moment on.

The beginning of all evil starts with denial of the Exalted One, and forgetting the Lord Most High. Is it conceivable that the Lord should be disobeyed by people of sure faith who acknowledge the Lord, know His Majesty and Glory, understand that He is nearer to them than life itself, and who believe that Allāh is the Absolute Creator of all things, and that He sees, knows and hears all things? Those who disobey the All-Glorious One, are either unbelievers who deny the Exalted Truth or heedless people who forget the Lord.

The unbeliever looks but does not see, listens but does not hear, hears but does not understand. Seeing, hearing and understanding are possible only with faith. A person's seeing, hearing and understanding increase in proportion to the light of his faith. This seeing is not seeing with the ordinary eye, but seeing with the eye of the heart. Those who possess this insight are better able to hear and understand the word of truth. This hearing is not the hearing of the ordinary ear but the hearing of the ear of the heart. One comes to see, hear and understand according to his degree of faith and level of piety. In other words the fundamentals are faith, sincerity and righteousness. That is why unbelievers and sinners are heedless, while believers are conscious according to the light of their faith and degree of their righteousness.

However many acts of worship a person may perform, the light of his faith will be weak unless he has wisdom and insight. If a person is truly righteous, he hears through the Truth, the Truth makes him see, the Truth

makes him taste and the Truth makes him understand. That is why the Lord of Majesty calls His Qur'ān "Guidance for the Righteous."

They believe in the Unseen and perform their prayers in calm humility. But is everyone righteous who believes in the Unseen and performs the prayer?

The answer to the question is quite obvious: the righteous are those who believe in the Unseen and take part in the prayer, knowing that the prayer they perform is not merely a matter of standing, bowing and prostrating, that just as they pray in the divine presence in this life, they must stand in the presence of God at the coming Resurrection and give account of all their worldly actions; they are those who never lose sight of these facts when performing their five daily prayers and who truly understand and experience the reality of all this in every prayer.

When it came to the time of prayer, the Imām of the East and the West, the noble and venerable °Alī ibn Abī Tālib, would sometimes turn pale and sometimes become flushed. When enlightened people asked him the reason for this, he replied: "The ritual prayer is a mighty trust. It was offered to the heavens and the earth but they recoiled, unwilling to hear it. I have undertaken to carry this trust and the time for discharging it has come. I cannot know whether or not I shall be able to discharge that trust in accordance with the wishes of the Exalted Lord, and His good pleasure. The ritual prayer is a model of the Resurrection, when we shall go to give account in the presence of the Truth."

WORSHIP: SUPERFICIAL OR PROFOUND?

People of insight are aware that the performance of ritual prayer cannot keep people from immoral and improper conduct unless they realize that it is a model of the Day of Resurrection and the Moment of Reckoning. There is performing the prayer and there is seeming to perform the prayer. There is performing the prayer and knowing what the prayer really is; there is performing the prayer and knowing only its outer form. There are some who perform the prayer and some who make a show of praying. There are some who genuinely pray and know what the prayer really is. There are also some who pray without the knowing what the prayer really is.

There are many who know such outer rules as which prayer is obligatory, necessary, customary or recommended, what annuls a prayer, is reprehensible in it or unlawful, yet do not know the significance of ritual prayer.

There are some who know both the external rules of ritual prayer and the meaning of it, but do not know its value.

As for the righteous, they know the outer rules of the prayer, its meaning and mystery and also its true value.

Those who merely make a show of prayer will not only receive no reward in the Hereafter, they will be chastised.

As for those whose prayers cannot keep them from immorality and impropriety, they give away the rewards for their prayers to those whose rights they have usurped, leaving themselves nothing but weariness.

For those who know both the outer and the inner and appreciate its true value, prayer becomes a heavenly ascension. Such prayer is acceptable to the Exalted Lord, and praiseworthy in His sight.

Ritual prayer is meeting with the All-Merciful. It is the mutual communion of worshipper and Worshipped. It is the lover’s display of affection for the Beloved.

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS: DESTINY

Of the six pillars of faith, two are particularly important. It could be said that all six pillars are combined in these two:

The first is belief in Allāh, Exalted is He.

The second is believing in Resurrection after death and accounting to the Exalted Lord for one’s worldly life.

The unbelievers, who deny all this, fall into three groups:

One set of unbelievers live like animals but are so far astray as to be below the animal level. These are stubborn unbelievers, who not only lack faith

themselves but do all they can to make others deviate. These are the cruel tyrants who see fit to harm the believers in every possible way.

The second group eats, drinks, lies down and gets up just like animals. They are unconscious of what they see and take no lessons from it. They know neither fear nor love of the Hereafter. The members of this group have no interest in life beyond eating, drinking and defecating.

The third group is those who perpetrate countless crimes, sins and wrongs, but do not wish to pay the penalty. Because they wish to continue in their wicked ways unpunished, they deny the Hereafter and do not want to hear one word about it.

To whichever of these three groups they belong, the unbelievers have one common destination: Hell.

Our blessed Master said: “I swear by the Exalted One who holds my soul in His Almighty Hand, that there are two places in the World to Come. Those who go there must enter one or the other, either Paradise or Hell.”

To believe in the Existence and Oneness of Allāh is to believe in the Messenger also. To love the Messenger is to love Allāh. To obey the Messenger is to obey Allāh. The Holy Qur’ān states quite plainly that to betray the Prophet is to betray the Exalted Lord.

Belief in Allāh entails belief in the angels, for they are the intermediaries between Allāh and the Messenger and between Allāh and His servants.

Belief in the angels implies belief in the revealed Books, namely the hundred Scrolls and the four principal Scriptures: the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel and the Qur'ān. All these heavenly Scriptures are the Word of Allāh. Through the medium of the blessed Gabriel, the Torah was revealed to Moses, the Psalms to David, the Gospel to Jesus, the hundred scrolls to other Prophets, and the Holy Qur'ān—the last Book—to the noble Messenger Muhammad. Just as the Qur'ān is the final Book, our blessed Master is the final Prophet. With the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān, the rulings of the other Books have been abrogated; their essential content has been incorporated in the Holy Qur'ān, so that those who read it obtain the reward for reading the hundred Scrolls and the other three major Books combined.

Those who believe in the Books must necessarily believe in the Messengers, and those who believe in all that we mentioned, namely in Allāh, the angels, the Books and the Messengers, must certainly believe in the Resurrection and the Hereafter. If something has a beginning, it naturally has an end. If a building is constructed, it must certainly fall in ruin. He who is born will surely die. No one, therefore, can deny the Resurrection and the Hereafter, just as no one is capable of rejecting and denying death. Not even an unbeliever can deny death or the Resurrection, which means the destruction of this world.

It is also obligatory to believe that good and evil alike come from Allāh. It is quite absurd to say, as some do: "The Exalted Lord creates the good, but we create evil." Such an assertion is at variance with belief in the Qur'ān and Islam. If Allāh was the Creator of the good and we the creators of evil, there would be a plurality of creators. Such was the belief of the ancient fire-worshippers of Iran, for they worshipped two gods, one of good and the other of evil. In Islam, however, there is but one Lord, Allāh. He is One in His Essence and His Attributes. All sovereignty rests in Him. He does

whatever He wills, for He is the Creator of good and evil, the All-Sustaining, the autonomous Owner and Ruler of the entire universe. We cannot know what is good or bad for us. What we suppose to be good may be bad for us, while what we consider bad may be good for us. These things are beyond our ken, known only to Allāh, Exalted is He. In fact, good or evil do not apply to God, but only to His creation. When certain Sufis say: "The good and the good are from Allāh," they do not mean to deny the existence of evil. They mean to say: "What matter whether it be good or bad, since everything is from Allāh. We accept everything as good, inasmuch as it comes from the Exalted Lord."

Everything in the universe comes into being through divine predestination. The actualization of good and evil can occur only through divine predetermination. Destiny must therefore be from Allāh. No one can create his own destiny. What we call destiny is our human awareness of events, known to the Exalted One from all eternity, as they become manifest through His predestination.

The Blessed Jesus Rejects the Temptation of Satan

"O Jesus," said Satan, "why not throw yourself down from this cliff?" When the blessed Jesus asked why he should do such a thing, Satan replied: "If it is your destiny to survive, you will somehow be saved. Surely you claim to have achieved complete submission to the Lord's decree?"

"Indeed!" said the venerable Jesus. "Your words are true, but your intention is false. Destiny is a mystery to me. If I threw myself down from this cliff, I would be testing the All-Glorious One in order to discover something known only to Him. That would be a form of blasphemy. We knew nothing

of this conversation before it happened, but it was known to the Exalted Lord from all eternity. Destiny has been fulfilled."

What Made the Venerable °Umar Run?

Some people saw the venerable °Umar quicken his pace as he passed by a wall that was about to collapse. "O °Umar," they asked, "are you running from destiny?" "No," he replied, "I am taking refuge with destiny from destiny!"

PARADISE: FOR BELIEVERS WHO DO RIGHTEOUS WORKS

Paradise-on-High is the station and abode of those who believe and who do righteous works. Righteous works are the foundation of faith and of Islam. If we liken faith to a candle, righteous works are its lantern. If we compare the religion of Islam to a house, faith is the roof and the four walls are prayer, fasting, almsgiving and Pilgrimage. Other good works represent the stucco, whitewash, paint, doors and windows. Just as the roof and ceiling would collapse without the four walls, it is very hard to maintain faith in the absence of righteous works.

Righteous works are of two kinds, the inner and the outer. The outer is further subdivided into: 1) Physical (e.g., ritual prayer and fasting) and 2) Financial (e.g., the alms-due, charity and the expense of Pilgrimage).

What is meant by the inner aspects of righteous works is the purging of the self and the purification of the heart.

Righteous works acceptable and desirable in the sight of the great saints of Allāh are: first, those external actions designed to beautify the outer being, namely ritual prayer, fasting, almsgiving, charity and Pilgrimage, then the illumination of the inner being through the purging of the self and purification of the heart.

Though they wear away their foreheads in prostration, those who observe the external rules alone, without achieving inner bliss, remain only half human. As for those who also master the purgation of the self and the purification of the heart, they become true servants of Allāh and kings of both worlds, as this glorious Verse makes plain:

If anyone acts righteously, it is for his own good; and if anyone does wrong, it is to his own loss. Your Lord is no tyrant to His servants. [41:46]

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A Fowler Frees a Partridge, Then Dreams of His Own Salvation

A partridge once fell into a fowler’s net. Just as the fowler was about to seize the partridge, the bird acquired the power of speech and said: “I am a poor little bird that never did anyone any harm. What do you want with me? Were I a bird of prey, you would put a stop to my depredations by wringing my neck, but as it is, what will you gain by taking my life?” The fowler was put to shame by these words. He set the partridge free at once, gathered up his nets and went home. That night he had a dream. The Resurrection had

broken and the Day of Judgment was at hand. He was doomed to Hell and the guardians were dragging him along. As he was quaking with terror, he saw himself saved from the Fire by the bird he had released that day. Awakening in fright, he immediately repented and begged forgiveness. He gave up fowling from that day on.

The benefit of righteous deeds may accrue in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

A Pilgrim Gives Water to a Thirsty Serpent

A man once made the intention to go on Pilgrimage, so he joined a Pilgrim caravan and set out on the journey.

The caravan made its way, stage by stage, crossing mountains, hills and deserts. One day when the weather was very hot, they were traversing a steep and perilous mountain terrain. The caravan suddenly came to a halt. Everyone was very puzzled since there was nowhere to rest or make camp.

Amid the clamor of voices asking: “What’s up, what’s going on? Why have we stopped?” someone said: “Go to the head of the caravan and take a look.”

Our candidate Pilgrim made his way to the front of the caravan and what should he see? An unusually large and imposing serpent had stopped the caravan in its tracks and was barring the way. The caravan tried to change course but the serpent slid around in the same direction. Whichever way

they tried to take, the serpent seemed determined to prevent them from moving on.

Being a stout-hearted and strong-wristed fellow, our candidate Pilgrim said to himself: “Let me do a good deed for the sake of Allāh. Maybe this terrible creature is suffering from thirst. Perhaps that is why he is blocking our way.” Taking a skin of water in his left hand and his sword in his right, he went right up to the serpent, set the water down in front of it and cried: “In case you are thirsty, there is some water for you. But if you intend to do us harm, I am waiting for you with my sword in hand.”

That terrifying serpent was clearly suffering from thirst for it approached the water skin, drank its fill, then slithered away towards a rocky slope.

The Pilgrim caravan proceeded on its way and eventually reached its destination. They visited the revered Ka°ba and the pure resting place of the blessed Prophet. When they had earned the honorable title of Pilgrim, they got together for the journey home. Along the way they camped at a spot near the mountainous terrain where the serpent had blocked their road. Our fully fledged Pilgrim got up to perform the vigil prayer, going some distance from the caravan to take his ablution. Having washed and prayed, he made his supplication. Weariness came over him when he had finished his worship and he fell asleep on the spot where he had prayed.

When he opened his eyes there was no caravan in sight, not a soul to be seen! He was left all alone in this trackless waste, not knowing which way to go. In fear and dread, he was wondering where to turn, when two camels came and stood in front of him. When he looked carefully he recognized one of the beasts as his own mount, but he was sure that the other did not belong to the caravan. Using articulate language, this second camel said to

him: “Come on, don’t stand there. Get up on my neck and let me take you to rejoin the caravan.”

The poor man mounted the camel and led his own by its halter until they caught up with the caravan. Delirious with joy, the Pilgrim asked the camel: “What are you, who are you? Tell me for the love of Allāh!”

The camel replied: “On your way to the Pilgrimage you quenched the thirst of a serpent that blocked your path. Well, I am that kindness and righteous deed of yours.”

In times like ours it is more than ever important to seize every opportunity for acts of kindness and righteous deeds. Let us not forget the words of our most blessed Master, the most noble Messenger: “In times of discord and corruption, one action in accordance with my example will earn the reward of one hundred martyrs.” In times when there are so few helpers on the path of Truth, the recompense for good deeds will surely be granted much more quickly.

The Umayyad Caliph °Umar Honored For His Just Rule

A noble saint had died, but as the washer was bathing his body he saw a vein move. “This person is still alive,” he said. They sent for a doctor at once and the man who had been considered dead was indeed found to be living still.

When they asked him what he had seen and felt in that short period between life and death, that noble individual replied: “As the angels were taking my soul and conveying it to my permanent abode, they received the order: ‘Return this man’s soul to his body, for his appointed time is not yet.’ As the angels were restoring my soul, I saw the noble Messenger sitting blissfully between the venerable Abū Bakr on his right and the venerable °Umar on his left. A most holy being sat very close in front of our Master and was conversing with him.

“ ‘Who is that person?’ I asked the angel. ‘Do you not recognize him?’ he said. ‘That noble being surrounded with light is the Lord’s Beloved and Intercessor on Judgment Day. Abū Bakr is to his right and °Umar is to his left. The man before him is °Umar ibn °Abd al-°Azīz.

“I then asked: ‘The venerable Abū Bakr and the venerable °Umar (ibn al-Khattāb) are both well known as beings of noble worth. But why is °Umar ibn °Abd al-°Azīz so close to the blessed Messenger?’

“The angel answered my question thus: ‘°Umar ibn °Abd al-Azīz was one of the Umayyad Caliphs. The reason for his attaining this eminence is that the religion of Islam had no helpers in the time of his Caliphate. While he held that office, he strove with all his might in the cause of Islam, applied the sacred law and ruled with justice. As you see, this is the rank achieved by those who serve the religion like the Caliph °Umar in a period when Islam has no helpers.’ ”

A Dervish Considers Himself Richer than the Sultan

A sultan was touring the country with his vizier and wherever they went the people were greeting their sovereign with displays of affection. Meanwhile, a dervish had sat down in a shop and was carefully observing the goings-on. Making his way through the cheering crowds, the sultan entered the shop where the dervish sat. The dervish paid no attention and did not even rise to his feet. This greatly annoyed the sultan, who turned to his minister and gave the command: “Teach this rude dervish a lesson in manners.”

Quite unperturbed by this, the dervish turned to the minister and said: “Tell your master to exert his authority over the people of this world who need him. As for me, I neither need nor respect anyone but Allāh, Exalted is He. Let no one presume to impose his rule on a poor man who has turned his face from this world. I neither ask nor expect anything of the world or the sultan.”

The sultan regretted his action when he realized that he was dealing with a man of God. He now ordered his minister to treat him favorably, saying: “This poor dervish speaks the truth.”

“Dervish,” said the minister, “you heard my sultan’s command. Ask for anything you wish.”

In response to this offer the dervish said: “What can a freeman ask of a slave? I am free and the sultan is a slave.”

These words upset the sultan, who asked the dervish: “I am a slave, am I?” The dervish calmly pressed the point: “Of course you are a slave,” he said, “for you are subject to your lower self and the prisoner of your passions.

You may be a sultan, but you are a servant and slave of your own lower nature. Your command and your favors are valid only for those who are also servants of their lower selves. Such people are grateful for your favors. Praise be to Allāh, I have put my self in its place and have become a freeman by making it my slave. Slaves cannot bestow favors on freemen. It is rather the free who bestow favors on slaves."

THE GREATER JIHĀD ("HOLY WAR")

Many people are Muslim in body and spirit yet their lower selves are unbelieving. A person may call himself a Muslim, perform the ritual prayer, keep the fast and even pay the alms-due and go on Pilgrimage, but we are forced to the conclusion that his lower self cannot be Muslim if he shows symptoms of such vices as malice, envy, irascibility, sanctimonious pride, hypocrisy and greed for reputation, money and status. It is very hard to bring one's lower self to Islam. The struggle with the lower self is tougher than the contest with the infidel. That is why our blessed Master described the struggle with external enemies as the lesser jihād and the struggle with the self as the greater jihād. The lower self is a man's greatest enemy, which can be subdued outwardly by means of prayer, fasting, alms-giving and Pilgrimage, and inwardly by following the example of the blessed Prophet and cultivating his moral character.

On the day of the Conquest of Mecca, the blessed Messenger addressed these words to the tribe of Quraysh who had so abused and ill-treated him:

"Not only did you not believe in me, you left no stone unturned in your cruel persecution of those who did believe. You compelled me and those who believed in me to migrate as exiles from our native place. You slew my dear uncle and many other believers. You saw fit to subject many of us to

torture and tribulation. But the Exalted One came to the aid and support of his servant and as you see, victory is mine today. We have been enabled to conquer Mecca. What treatment do you expect from me?”

In their shame and remorse, those cruel opponents of Islam, the final Prophet and all the people of faith, could only say: “We are Joseph’s brothers.”

This was their way of alluding to the fact that when the blessed Joseph became ruler of Egypt, he pardoned his envious brothers who had thrown him into the well and sold him into slavery. Without openly begging for pardon, they were saying in effect: “We also expect pardon and generosity from you today.”

Our blessed Master said: “Yes, I have pardoned you,” and he did indeed declare general amnesty.

Just as he brought joy to the offending Meccans in their humiliation, so at the Place of Resurrection will he delight the sinful and the suffering with his intercession.

Our Master the glorious Messenger is an Excellent Model [uswatun hasana]. Those who adopt his character and follow him will find bliss and salvation in both worlds.

RECOMMENDED INVOCATIONS AND PIOUS EXPRESSIONS

To obtain approval and honor in the sight of Allāh and his angels, we should memorize and use the following seven expressions:

1. Before eating: “In the name of Allāh [bismi-llāh.]”

2. After eating: “Grateful Praise to Allāh [al-hamdu lillāh].”

3. To repent and seek forgiveness for backbiting: “O Allāh, forgive me and those I have slandered [Allāhumma-ghfir lī wa-liman aghtābuh].”

4. When proposing to undertake something the next day: “If Allāh wills [in shā’a-llāh].”

5. In response to any act of piety or sin: “There is no power or strength except in Allāh, All-High and All-Glorious [lā hawla wa-lā qūwata illā bi-llāhi-l°alīyi-l °azīm].”

6. When a misfortune befalls: “We belong to Allāh and to Him we are returning [innā lillāh wa-innā ilayhi rāji°ūn].”

7. At every moment, always and everywhere: “There is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is the messenger of Allāh [lā ilāha illā-llāh Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh].”

We should accustom our tongues to uttering the affirmation of Divine Unity, for the blessed Messenger said:

“Every creature will be resurrected according to his condition at death.”

If you die affirming the Divine Unity you will be resurrected with that affirmation on your lips. You will then meet the Messenger, on him be peace, and be lodged close to him.

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This sacred affirmation can be your salvation in both worlds:

lā ilāha illā-llāhu Muhammadun rasūlu-llāh

“There is no god but Allāh; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.”

If you make this affirmation with your lips and confirm it with your heart, all your sins will fall away like leaves in an autumn breeze.

You should also constantly repeat:

“Glory be to Allāh and praise be to Allāh and there is no god but Allāh and Allāh is Supremely Great [subhāna-illāhi wa-l’hamdu lillāhi wa-lā ilāha illā-llāhu wa-llāhu akbar].”

and:?“Glory be to Allāh and with His praise; glory be to Allāh, the All-Glorious [subhāna-illāhi wa-bi-hamdihi subhāna-l’°azīm].”

On the Day of Resurrection these two light sentences will fill the right hand scale of your Balance, the scale of merit. Those who make a practice of repeating them attain boundless happiness in this world and the Hereafter.

Glory to your Lord, the Lord Almighty, beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds ...

THE THIRTY-THIRD DISCOURSE

Unity in Brotherhood

Bismi'llāhi'r-rahmāni'r-rahīm

In the Name of Allāh, All-Merciful and Compassionate

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Hold fast to the life-line of Allāh, all together, and do not separate ... [3:103].

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INTERPRETATION OF SŪRA ĀL °IMRĀN, v. 103

The cord or life-line of Allāh is the blessed Messenger, the Holy Qur'ān which he brought to us through divine revelation, and the religion of Islam through which we learn and come to understand the Qur'ān. To these we must hold fast all together, not scattering into separate factions. The greatest cause of dissension is greed and envy. These we must transform into contentment, if we are to deserve the love of Allāh and His Messenger.

A person who is insatiable remains poor however rich he seems to become.

Saint Ibrāhīm Ad'ham Refuses a Rich Man's Gift

A man once wished to give some money to the venerable Ibrāhīm Ad'ham. The saint said to him: "If you are rich I shall accept your money, but if you are bankrupt I shall not take it."

“Yes, I am rich,” the would-be giver assured him, whereupon the following conversation took place between them:

“So you are rich, are you, how much money do you have?” “I have two thousand gold pieces.” “Do you wish you had four thousand?” “Of course, I do.”

“Wouldn’t you rather have eight thousand?” “ Naturally.” “Would you be happier still if you had ten thousand gold pieces?” “No doubt about it.” “You say you are rich but you are nothing of the sort. You are an impoverished bankrupt from the likes of whom I do not accept money. Keep the money you wanted to give me, add it to the rest and go your way happy.”

True wealth consists not in abundance of money, not in goods and property, but in contentment.

The noble Salmān al-Fārisi wept as he lay on his deathbed. “O Abū °Abdullāh,” they said to him, “do you regret having to leave this world?”

“No,” said he, “that is not the reason for my tears. I am looking at these possessions of mine I am about to leave and wondering how I shall account for them to Allāh, Exalted is He. I am weeping from fear of having transgressed in the matter of property, for the blessed Prophet said: ‘None of you needs more worldly goods than a traveler would take along on a journey.’”

In fact, his worldly goods consisted of a sword, an earthenware pot and a cushion.

Greed is a quality hateful to Allāh, abhorrent to the Messenger, and loathsome to righteous believers. The principal cure for such spiritual sickness is to read the Holy Qur'ān, to reflect upon it, to steep oneself in it, to make it the criterion for all one's conduct and to obey its laws.

The first commandment of the Holy Qur'ān is the affirmation of Unity and Oneness. The Holy Qur'ān strongly urges us not to separate in disunity but to cling to that lifeline, one end of which is in God's Almighty Hand, while the other is extended to His creatures. It commands us to rally in a single body around the blessed Prophet who is the spirit of the Holy Qur'ān and the religion of Islam.

Unfortunately, the Muslims have failed to appreciate the importance of this Qur'ānic injunction, clear and explicit as it is. Factious discord broke out even in the time of the third Caliph, °Uthmān ibn °Affān. For centuries, dissension and enmity among the Muslims themselves have served the cause of those hostile to Islam, including not only unbelievers but also many hypocrites in Muslim guise.

The Sunnī-Shī°ī conflict has been particularly tragic. For instance:

Schism and Treachery Deliver Baghdād to the Mongols

A famous Shī°ī scholar called Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī presented a book he had written to the Caliph al-Musta°sim. The Caliph handed Tūsī's work to the Sheikh al-Islam and asked his opinion of it. A brief perusal of the book was enough to tell the Sheikh al-Islam that this was a very valuable work. He quickly realized that if he praised it to the Caliph, the author would come into favor and might even supplant him as Sheikh al-Islam. He saw no course open to him except to keep Tūsī from favor by belittling his important work. Concern for his personal welfare made him forget his scholarship and humanity. Turning to Nasīr al-Dīn, he said insultingly: "You would have done better had you brought us a pair of those Transoxianian bulls."

This unjust derision was more than Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī could stomach. He picked up his book and left the court, saying: "We could also bring you bulls from Transoxiana!"

Unfortunately, like the Sheikh al-Islam he let his feelings get the better of him. Greedy for revenge, he went straight to Hulagu Khan and urged him to march on Baghdād. "Baghdād is enormously rich," he said. "Besides, there is enough in al-Musta°sim's treasury to buy the whole world."

Although Hulagu Khan was a sky-worshipping infidel, he said to Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī: "Your words are fine but I cannot attack the Caliph in Baghdād. He is a descendant of the venerable Muhammad. If I were to fight someone of that lineage and shed his blood, the sky god would not allow the rain to fall."

Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī was undeterred by this response. "My Khan," he said, "the Caliph in Baghdad is a very distant cousin of Muhammad. Did your sky god stop the rain in the year 63 of the Hijra, when they slew the

venerable Muhammad's own grandson Imām Husayn at Karbalā', along with his children and other close relatives?"

When Hulagu Khan had thought this over, he had to agree with Tūsī. He marched with his army against Baghdād and besieged the city on all sides.

The Sheikh al-Islam was very surprised to receive this message from Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī: "You did not like the book I wrote and presented to the Caliph, telling me I would do better to bring bulls from Transoxiana. I promised to bring you what you wanted and here I am, having kept my word."

The Grand Vizier of al-Musta°sim, a Shī°ī named °Alqama, betrayed his master out of sectarian zeal and plotted with Hulagu Khan, whom he visited under the pretext of a peacemaking mission. Returning to the Caliph, he said: "O Commander of the Believers, I have found a peace formula. We shall bring about a marriage between your son and the daughter of Hulagu Khan. Let us get ready at once to go and seek the girl's hand, so that the marriage can be contracted without delay."

Unaware of the dreadful conspiracy against him, the Caliph set out with his retinue for the meeting with Hulagu Khan. As soon as they left the citadel they fell into the trap prepared for them. The courtiers were put to the sword then and there. As for the unfortunate Caliph, they put him in a sack and tied it up tight. The unlucky ruler then suffered a tragic death, trampled beneath the hooves of the cavalry. Brandishing their arms, the Mongol soldiers entered the city. Baghdād was razed to the ground and eight hundred thousand innocent people were slain. They plundered the city and threw priceless works of Islamic scholarship into the river Tigris. For days the river ran black with ink.

It is worth noting that °Alqama's treachery did not earn him the favor he had expected from Hulagu Khan. He was slain and sent on his way to Hell.

A Wolf Exploits the Quarrel Between Two Rams

Two rams were fighting, while a wolf looked on from behind a thicket. "Fight on, fight on," said the wolf to himself. "Fight until you are too exhausted to move, then I'll come and eat you both up."

We Muslims have been fighting one another just like the two rams in the story, exhausting ourselves to the point where we become easy prey for our enemies.

ALL MUSLIMS ARE ONE BROTHERHOOD

If someone says: "I am a Muslim," we should never say: "No you are not a Muslim." As the Holy Qur'ān tells us:

Do not say to anyone who greets you with 'Peace!': 'You are not a believer!' [4:94]

Every individual who says: "There is no god but Allāh and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh," is a Muslim, provided he affirms this good

sentence with his lips and confirms it with his heart. In Islam, no attention is paid to differences of nationality, color, race or language. All Muslims are brothers one to another, be they beautiful or ugly, learned or uneducated, rich or poor:

The believers are nothing if not brothers ... [49:10]

None is superior to another. The highest and noblest in the sight of Allāh are those who fear Him:

His intimate friends are none but the righteous... [8:34].

The body of Islam is an inseparable whole and lā ilāha illā-llāh is a sure fortress of Allāh, Exalted is He ... Even if you are all alone in the world, do not let go of the divine life-line: the Holy Qur'ān and the Chief of the Prophets. Beg the Exalted Lord to let you die a believer and to include you among the righteous. Be kind and compassionate to all creatures! Acknowledge every Muslim as your brother! Give no one reason to fear your hand or your tongue! Be humble! Glory in your religion, not in yourself! If you are constant in your faith in Allāh and His Messenger, and if you observe the sacred law, you will enjoy dignity in both worlds. But if you turn away from Allāh and His Messenger, you will be abject in both worlds, doomed to everlasting humiliation.

DUTIES ALL MUSLIMS SHOULD OBSERVE

The most important duties of a Muslim are:

To awake from the sleep of heedlessness and never to fall back into it.

To turn in repentance to Allāh, Exalted is He.

To cultivate piety and righteousness (for ordinary people, piety means avoiding what Allāh has forbidden; for the elite, it means avoiding what is merely doubtful also).

Self-discipline.

To reflect on our relationship with God’s creation, and to have respect for the rights of others.

To attribute positively useful actions to God, while repenting and feeling remorse for the bad things that happen.

To have a firm resolve.

Liberality and vigor in the pursuit of objectives. Freedom from attachment to worldly things. Recognition of one’s poverty and impotence (with the acknowledgment that all power and ability belong to Allāh, Exalted is He).

Honesty and truthfulness (to be upright both inwardly and outwardly).

Patience (uncomplaining steadfastness in the face of misfortunes. Perseverance in worship and in checking evil desires).

Contentment (taking pleasure and enjoyment in the trials that come, in the name of Allāh, Exalted is He).

Sincerity (acknowledging that everything is from God, seeing nothing but the Truth, looking to God for everything).

Endurance and Forbearance (to rely on the Lord in all undertakings and to bind one's heart to Him).

THE HEART AS THE MIRROR OF TRUTH

As we have mentioned earlier, the principal cure for spiritual sickness is reading the Qur'ān, reflecting on it, understanding what one reads, obeying its commandments and avoiding things it prohibits. Other useful remedies are: moderation in eating and drinking, praying during the night, earnest supplication during the hours of vigil and keeping the company of the righteous.

When the heart has been purified through being treated with these medicines, it becomes the Mirror of Truth. Such hearts are truly

enlightened. The enlightened heart can distinguish between good and evil. It does not notice the faults of others, but sees only its own shortcomings. It does not look askance at other servants of Allāh, nor does it look down on them. To repent and feel sorry for a sin, they say, is better than performing an act of worship with sanctimonious pride or hypocrisy.

Those whose hearts are enlightened never fail to affirm the Divine Unity. They love all the believers. They do not set up sects or factions within Islam. They pardon their believing brothers for any wrong they suffer at their hands. Even if they suffer deprivation, they do not deprive in return. Even if other believers criticize them, they do not criticize in return. If the believers abandon them, they do not abandon in return. They practice generosity and magnanimity, for their hearts have been healed and filled with wisdom.

The wise do not look with scorn upon other servants of Allāh. They look to the Exalted Lord in gratitude. There is perceptiveness in their eyes and light in their hearts. They are the ones who hold fast to the secure life-line of Allāh, and are united in affirming His Unity. Unfailingly and wholeheartedly they observe the commandments of Allāh, the Lord of Glory, from the smallest to the greatest.

Would you like an example? Consider Abū Bakr and look at the supplication he used to make: “O Lord, make the body of Abū Bakr so big that You may fill Hell with it, leaving no room there for sinful believers to burn.” Consider another supplication of that same supremely veracious Abū Bakr: “My God, whatever afflictions and maladies You have in store for the Community of Muhammad, give them all to me. Let the Community of Muhammad enjoy pure comfort and happiness.”

Ma°rūf al-Karkhī relates that a person will be recorded in the register of saints if he prays ten times each day: “O Lord, correct the Community of Muhammad. O Lord, solve every problem for the Community of Muhammad. O Lord, have mercy on the Community of Muhammad.”

The supreme example is our blessed Master, the venerable Muhammad Mustafā, Chief of the Prophets and Messenger to men and jinn, who used to pray: “My God, for the sake of my Community I would sacrifice my self, my Fātima, my °Ā’isha, my dear grandsons Hasan and Husayn, my Ruqayya, my Zaynab, my Ibrāhīm, my Qāsim, my °Abdullāh and my Tayyib.”

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FINAL PRAYERS OF SUPPLICATION

O Lord, may we all enjoy the favorable regard of the blessed Messenger, his wives, children, companions and friends.

O Lord, make us all worthy of the revered Sheikhs of the noble Orders, especially our Master, Pīr Muhammad Nūr al-Dīn al-Jerrāhī, sanctified be his triumphant spirit.

O Lord, rejoice the souls of the noble Sheikhs of our Order, especially my beloved teacher and predecessor, the venerable Seyyid Ibrahim Fahri Efendi.

O Lord, bless the enlightened souls of my teachers: Mustafa Efendi (the "Walking Library"); Osman Shakir Efendi; Hajji Hüseyin Hüsnü Efendi; Muhammed Rasim Efendi; Husrev Efendi; Sheikh Sami Saruhani; Ahmed Tahir-il Marashi Efendi; and all others from whose learning and goodness I have derived benefit.

My Lord, bless the souls of my father Hajji Mehmet Efendi and especially my revered mother Hajja A'isha Hanim. May they enjoy the intercession of the Qur'ān and the intercession of the final Prophet. Lodge them in Paradise-on-High beside Your Chosen Prophet, O my Lord.

My Lord, bless my daughter A'isha and my son Muhammed Jüneyd. Make them steadfast in the religion of Islam and fill their hearts with the light of Divine Unity.

My Lord, bless all those who have contributed to the preparation and publication of this work. May it give guidance and happiness to the hearts of those who have read it.

O Lord, grant us all a good end and outcome. Accept our supplications in honor of Your refined Beloved.

Glory to your Lord, the Lord Almighty, beyond description; and peace upon the Messengers; and grateful praise to Allāh, Lord of all the Worlds ...

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